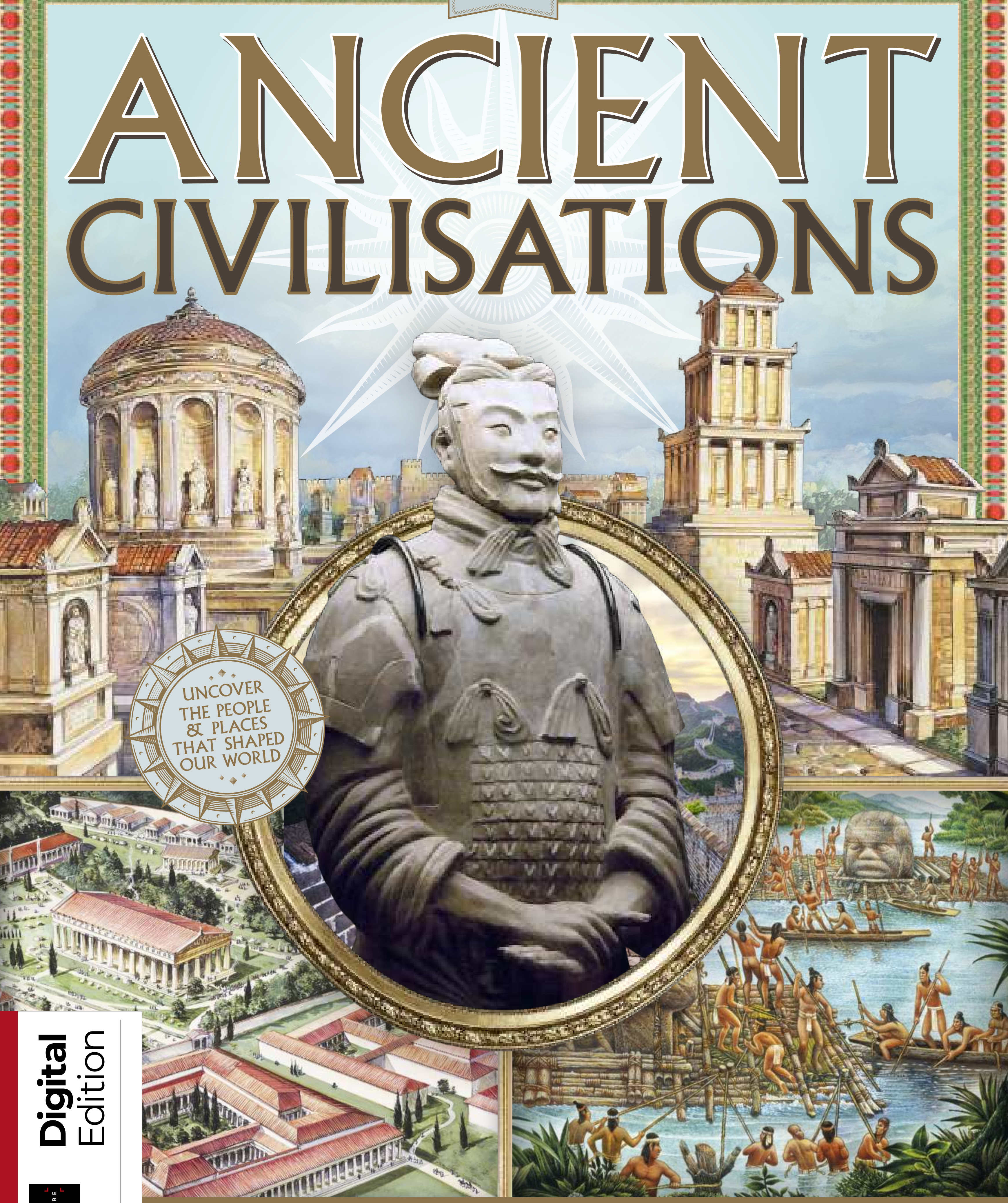
NEW

ANCIENT CIVILISATIONS



UNCOVER THE PEOPLE & PLACES THAT SHAPED OUR WORLD

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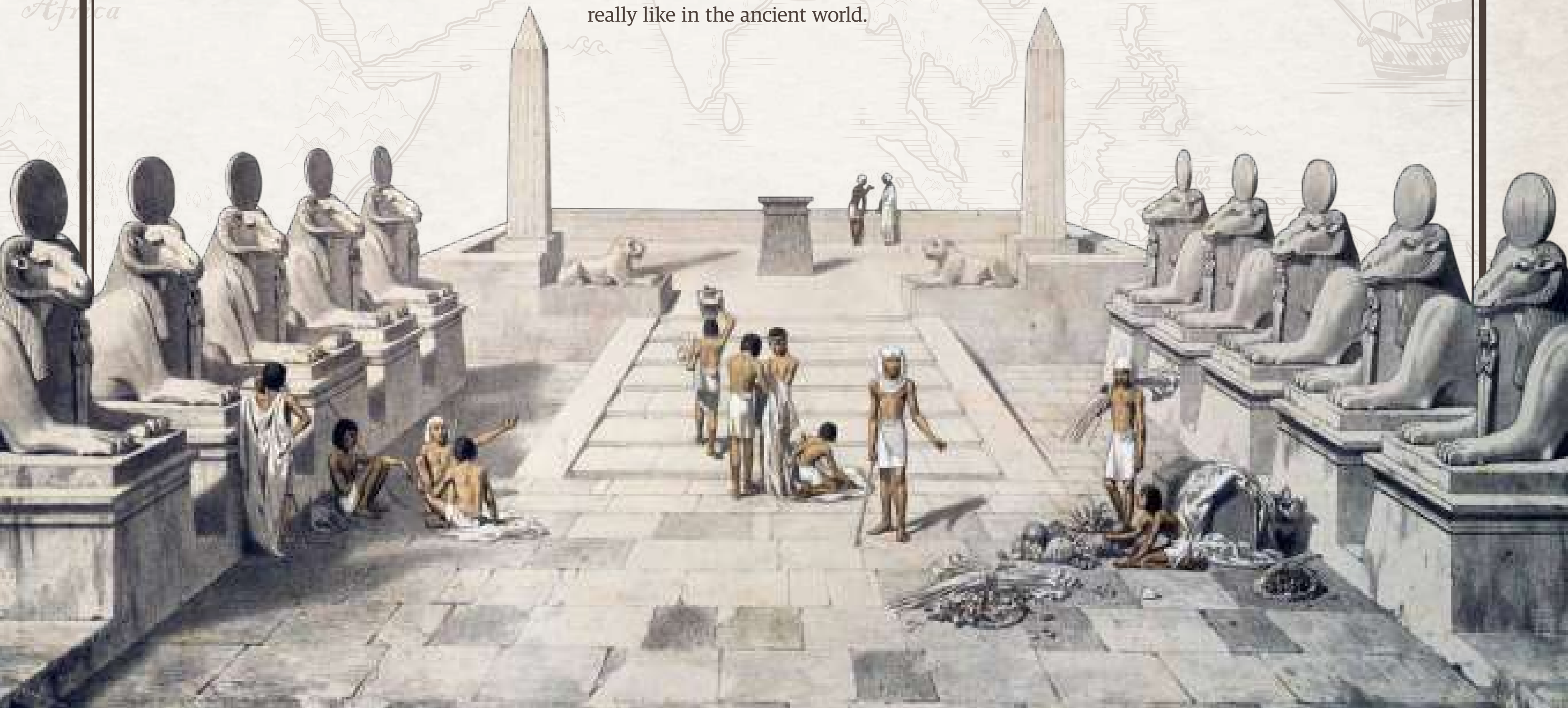

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FUTURE

ANCIENT CIVILISATIONS

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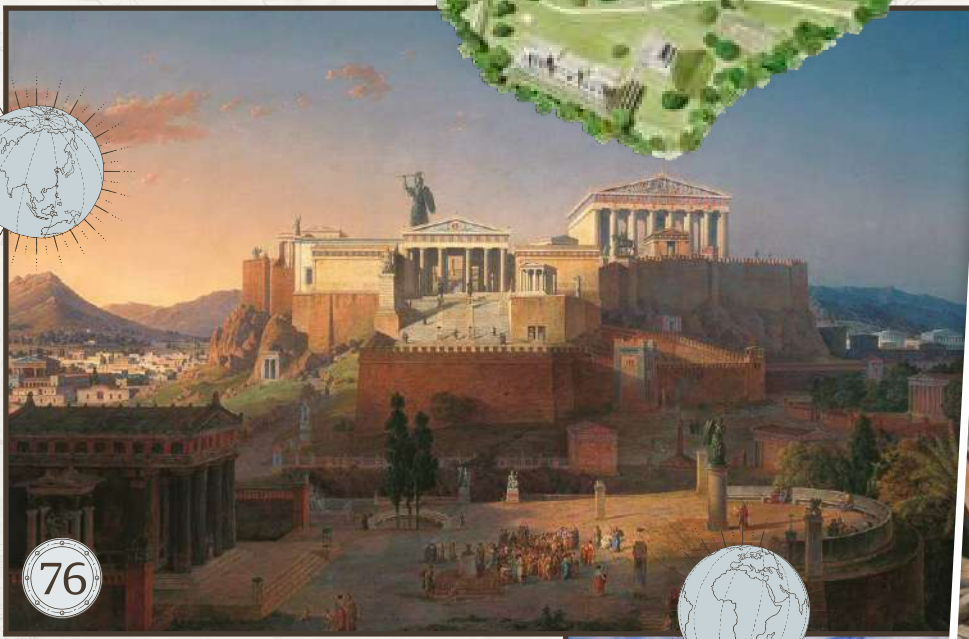

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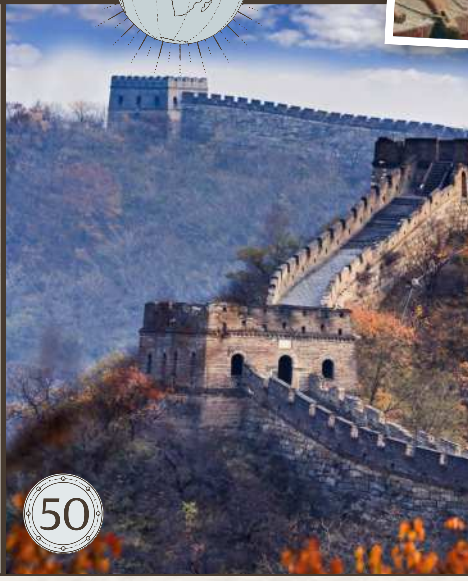

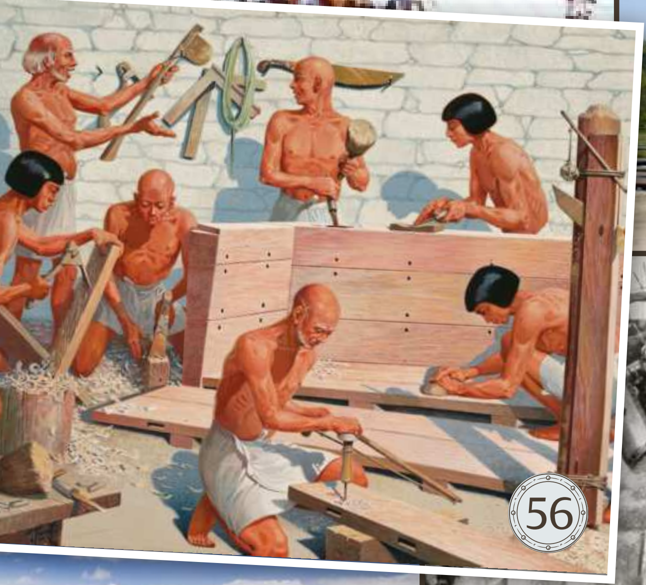

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LOST CIVILISATIONS

Six forgotten superpowers that shaped the world we know today

Written by Jack Griffiths

History is often described as being written by the winners, which is a fair point when you consider the emphasis that is placed on the Romans, Egyptians and Greeks. However, in the ancient world, there were many other cultures and kingdoms that helped form the history of the human race and add to humanity's conquest of Earth. Originally full of bustling metropolises and unique cultures, some of these empires were unlucky enough to come into contact with the all-conquering force of the Roman legions or Greek hoplites, while others were victims of devastating natural disasters. Additionally, the fall of some of these civilisations is shrouded in mystery, with various theories as to how and why they suddenly vanished. Subsequently, much of their influence and memory have been long since forgotten.

Luckily, the modern world is full of clues that have stood the test of time, from the ruins of fallen cities through to the systems and structures that we use today. These seven forgotten civilisations may not have contributed as much to human progression as their more famous counterparts, but they remain an integral cog in the evolution of trade, architecture and warfare.

Discover the cultures that built the first aqueducts, invented the 365-day calendar, smelted the first iron weapons and even built the first zoos. Read on to meet the people who gave the Egyptians an honest run for their money and a civilisation that survived two natural disasters that shook their small remote island home, as we shine a light on Earth's greatest lost civilisations.

HITTITE EMPIRE

Egypt's greatest rivals, the Hittites were masters of the chariot

Where was it: **Turkey, Syria and Iraq**

Dates of civilisation: **c.1700-700 BCE**

Strengths: **Expert chariot makers, iron manufacture, fortified city of Hattusa**

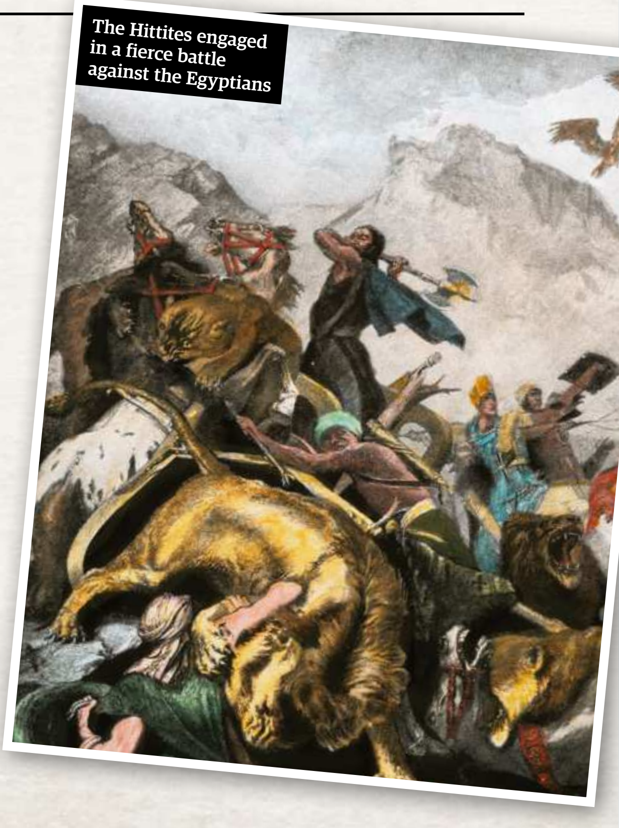
Weaknesses: **Drawn-out rivalry with Egyptians, city-states had no political unity, slow economical advancement**

Amazing fact: **Hittite battle axes were shaped like human hands!**

At its peak, the Hittite Empire rivalled the more famous kingdom of Egypt, and were such a threat that Egypt's pharaoh Ramesses II resorted to signing a peace treaty with the Hittites after the brutal Battle of Kadesh, history's biggest chariot battle. However, they slipped quietly from the historical radar after being assumed into the Assyrian Empire and because their culture varied considerably between each region. The Hittites' call to fame was their chariot building. Among the first civilisations to pioneer the manufacture of iron, their warrior-like culture thrived before being overwhelmed by the superior Assyrians.

At its largest extent, Hittites were found in modern-day Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Like many other forgotten civilisations, Hittite lands were divided up into city-states with no political unity with each other. The biggest of these was the mountain fortress of Hattusa, which was heavily fortified by King Suppiluliuma.

The Hittite Empire collapsed in 1160 BCE after a civil war and a scramble for the throne. Scattered and leaderless, a settlement was formed between the Syro-Hittite peoples, but this was only a brief respite before they were invaded by the Assyrians in 700 BCE.


The Hittites engaged in a fierce battle against the Egyptians

ETRURIA

Before the Romans, Italy was occupied by a civilisation who were just as advanced

02

Where was it:
Central Italy
When did it exist:
800-250 BCE
Strengths: **Construction expertise, iron and copper trade, urban planning**
Weaknesses: **Poor army, territory desirable to invaders, locality to Rome**
Amazing fact: **The Etruscans invented the idea of armed combat for sport, or as we more commonly know them: gladiators.**

The Etruscan story begins in post-Iron Age Italy. Originally inhabiting the area we now know as Tuscany, Ancient Etruria grew in the 9th and 8th centuries BCE thanks to its rich seams of mineral ores, strong agriculture and plentiful timber resources. The civilisation reached the height of its power in the 6th century BCE when 12 city-states were allied in the Etruscan League. The main cities were Tarquinii, Vulci, Caere and Veii, whose economy was based on a thriving copper and iron trade with the Greeks and Carthaginians. Being the first real major settlement on the Italian peninsula, Etruria became the basis of the civilisations in late antiquity to follow. They were one of the first peoples to dispose of kings and be ruled by an intelligentsia of aristocrats and magistrates, and their architecture and construction techniques arguably influenced the Romans as much as the Greeks did. Their homes were made from mud brick baked in the hot Mediterranean sun mixed with wood and stone, and some even had upper storeys. These houses, which were very advanced for their time, were set into the first type of rectangular urban planning and were accompanied by roads and bridges, which used arch and vault construction techniques. Even the Latin alphabet and the Roman toga have their origins in the Etruscan people.

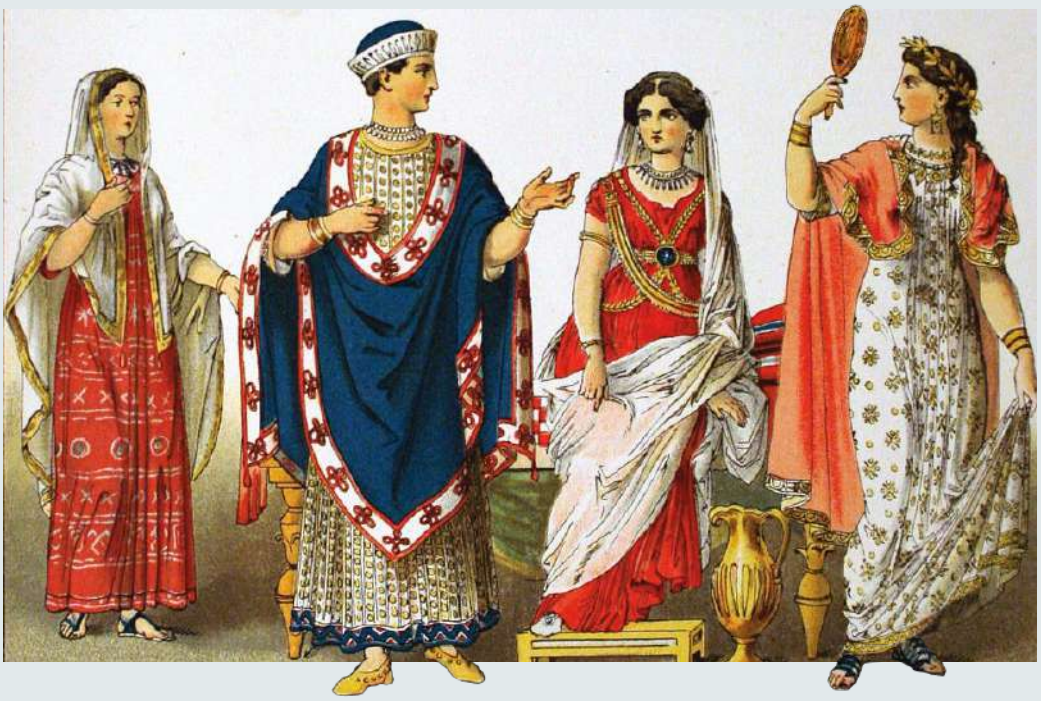
Etruria is also known for its maritime prowess as the Etruscans explored the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, establishing colonies on Corsica, Sardinia and even in Spain. The Romans, a civilisation that owed so much to the Etruscans, proved to be their downfall. The growing Roman military juggernaut proved irresistible to Etruscan resistance as their league of city-states was annexed into the new Roman Republic in 250 BCE.

Dr Kathryn Lomas

Dr Lomas is an honorary senior research associate at University College London and a part-time tutor in Classics at the University of Durham.

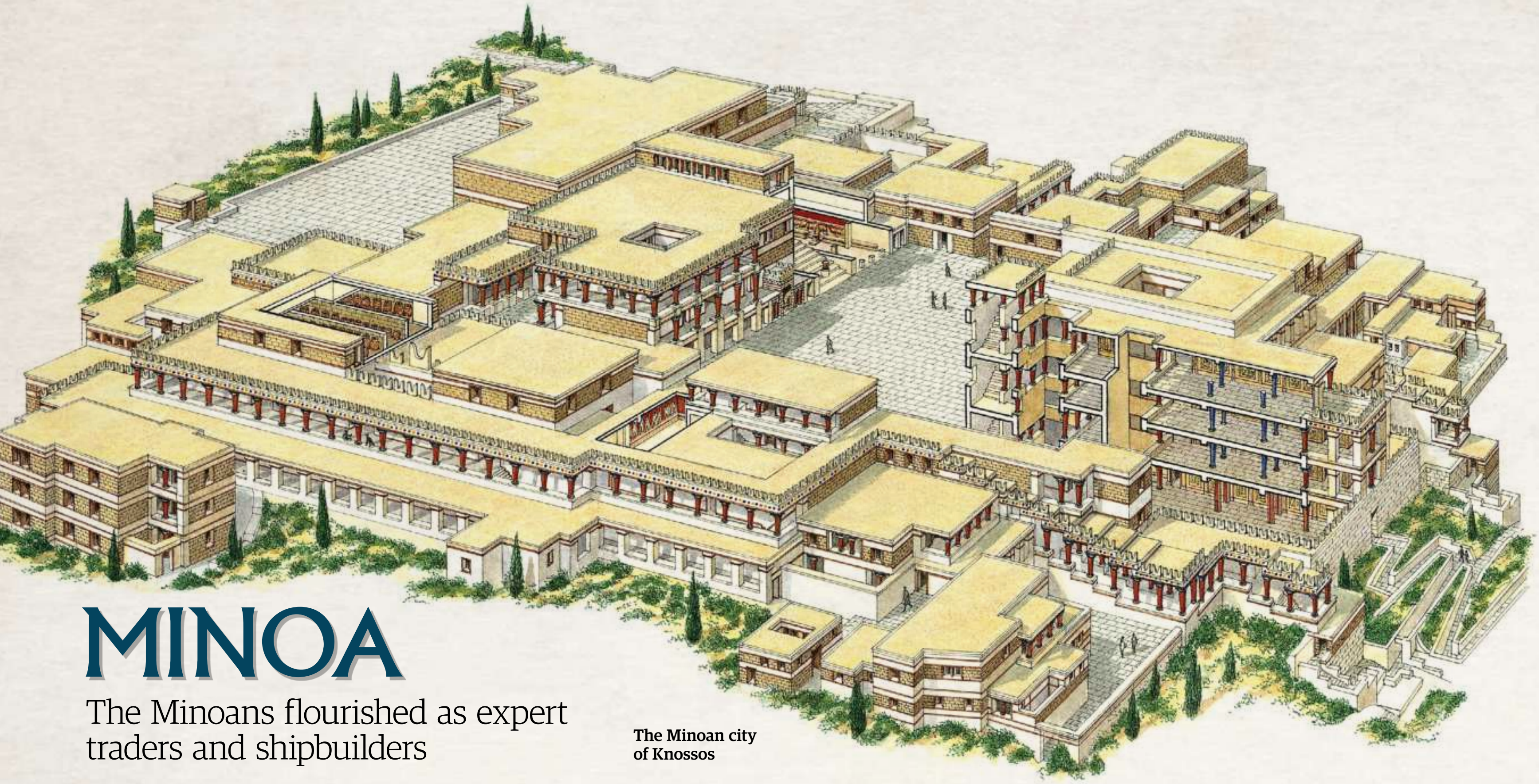
The most significant Etruscan remains are the cemeteries of their key cities and, to a lesser extent, their settlements. Unlike the Greeks, they did not leave impressive buildings, but their tombs (many with frescoes depicting Etruscan society, myths and legends) and their contents are elaborate. Their most obvious lasting impact is the dissemination of writing and literacy. The Etruscans were the first Italian culture to adopt writing, adapting the Phoenician alphabet in the 8th century BCE.

The city walls of Velathri, a major city in the Etruscan League



How we picked our list

Choosing which 'forgotten' civilisations to include was difficult as it depends on how the word 'forgotten' is defined. It was essential that we find civilisations that were much less known than the major cultures of antiquity, such as the Romans and Greeks, but also contributed to the human race. There were a number of South American civilisations, but the Tiwanaku fit the bill due to their iconic pyramids and innovative farming methods. The Etruscans and Minoans were definite choices as they fit the bill perfectly, while the Hittites and Phoenicians both contributed to their area and era in ways that haven't been discussed extensively.



MINOA

The Minoans flourished as expert traders and shipbuilders

The Minoan city of Knossos

03

Where was it: Crete
When did it exist: 3000-1100 BCE
Strengths: Bureaucratic hierarchy, shipbuilding, knowledge of metallurgy
Weaknesses: Weak military, natural disasters
Amazing fact: The Minoans had a sport that involved jumping over bulls' horns

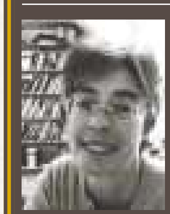
---

Of all the lost civilisations, the Minoans may be the most mysterious. Isolated on the Greek island of Crete, their society flourished with little interruption for centuries. Arguably the first European civilisation, they first settled on Crete in 3000 BCE and were later influenced by the neighbouring Greek and Egyptian civilisations with whom they frequently traded with. Minoan culture originally had no centralised government and a flexible ruling system with large, grand palaces acting as the key areas of administration. Tombs known as 'tholos' were the key architectural feature of the Minoans and this, along with their paved road system, running water and pottery was incorporated by the later Greek and Roman civilisations.

By 2000 BCE, kings had assumed control of the island as wine, olive oil, wool and cloth exports flourished. It was the beginning of a bureaucratic system and social hierarchy on the island, with nobles and peasants making up an early feudal system. Women also played a large role in society, serving as administrators and priestesses, and had the same rights as men. It was this unity that made the Minoans such a remarkable people.

The Minoans had a strong maritime presence that helped them import large sums of copper, silver and gold. Around 1700 BCE, the Minoan culture was shaken by an earthquake that destroyed many of their settlements. They managed to recover from this natural disaster, but now had company on the Mediterranean; Greeks and Mycenaeans began to threaten trade interests, especially as the Minoans had now expanded to other Greek islands such as Thera, Rhodos, Melos and Kythira. Their luck got even worse when in 1375 BCE, the island's largest city, Knossos, was devastated. Historians argue whether this was the work of an invasion force or a volcanic eruption, but either way it crippled the Minoan people, who were dispatched by an oncoming invasion force in 1100 BCE. The people of Crete now answered to Athens. The Minoans would never trouble the history books again.

Dr Nicoletta Momigliano



Dr Momigliano is a reader in Aegean Prehistory at the University of Bristol and a specialist in Minoan archaeology. I would not say that the Minoan civilisation is 'forgotten' – instead, I would say it is not as well known as the Roman, Greek or Egyptian civilisations for three principal reasons. First, because the Minoans have been known to scholars and the general public alike for a much shorter time, having been rediscovered only in the early 20th century; second, because they have left their mark on a smaller geographical area; and third, because their artefacts and monuments, although impressive, are not as large and grandiose as those of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans.

Knossos Palace is the largest Bronze Age archaeological site on Crete

PHOENICIA

A kingdom of expert traders, this civilisation sailed the seas with no fear and colonised vast swathes of the Mediterranean

Where was it:
Lebanon and Israel
When did it exist:
4000-332 BCE
Strengths: Peaceful and diplomatic city-states, maritime strength, dye and metal production
Weaknesses: Minimal military strength, no real capital city or stronghold
Amazing fact: The Ancient Olympic Games originated in Phoenicia

Before transport systems on land became popular, waterways were the best way of travelling long distances, be it for trade or conquest. The greatest pioneers of sea travel in the ancient world were the Phoenicians who made the Mediterranean their own until their demise at the hands of Alexander the Great in 322 BCE. A series of independent city-states, the biggest of their settlements were Tyre and Sidon. A peaceful people, it is believed these states never once went to war with each other, and their peaceful and diplomatic reputation helped them stave off invasion for a prolonged period, simply because their trade was too valuable to lose. The Phoenicians' openness to dealing with all nations they came across allowed them to trade a variety of goods.

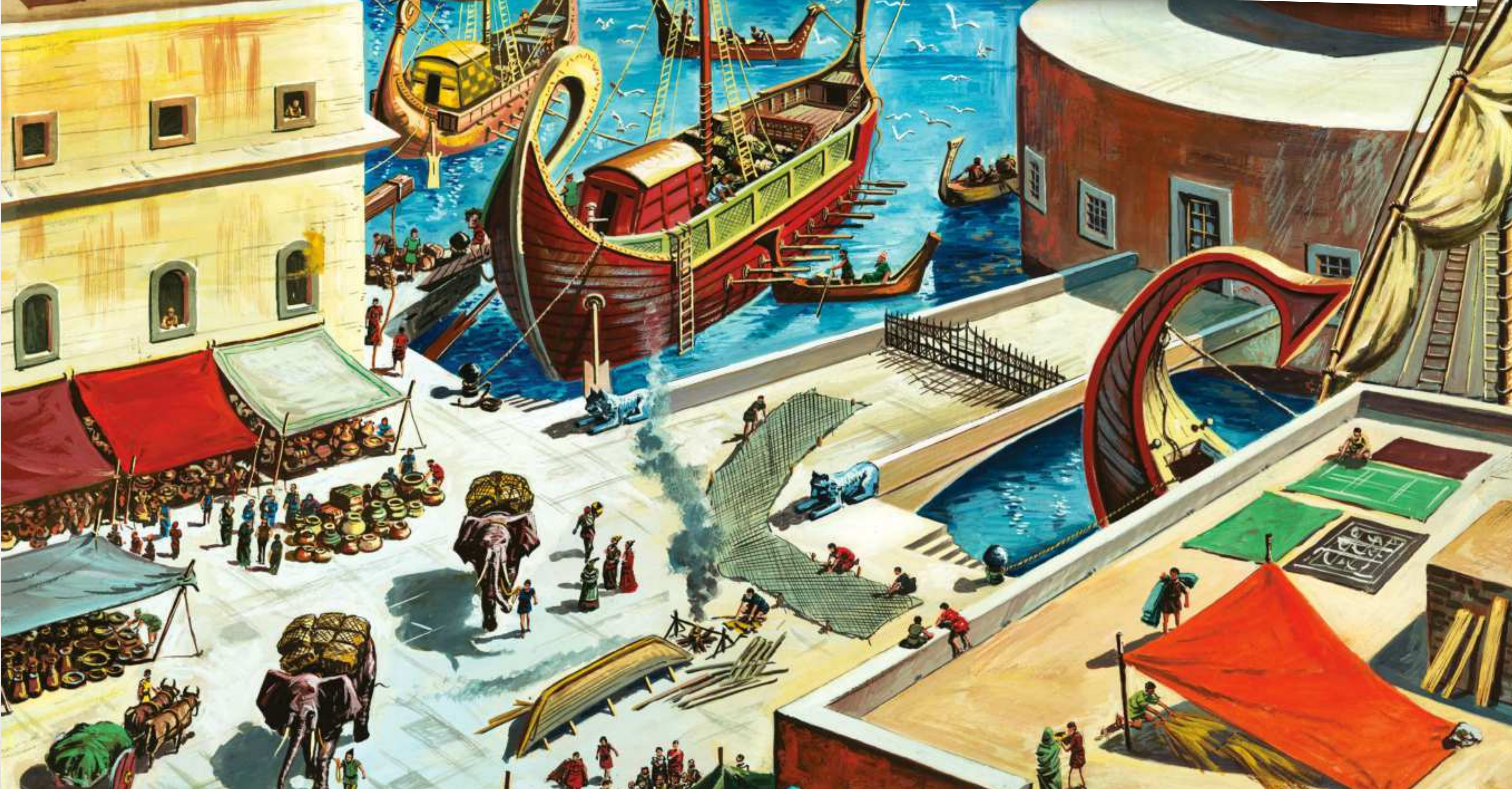
They were particularly skilled in shipbuilding (they were the first people to invent the curved hull and the galley design), glass making, jewellery and even furniture. There is evidence of Phoenician involvement throughout the Mediterranean, even reaching as far west as modern-day Spain and Portugal. There are also claims they sailed to Britain in search of rich tin seams. Equally unknown to many, they are credited with founding Carthage, a city that would become a major centre in the Carthaginian and Roman Empires.

Phoenicia is known as Canaan in Hebrew and is named after 'phoinikes', the Greek word for purple, due to their production of purple dye, which would later become the colour of royalty and aristocracy in both Greece and Rome. Prior to Alexander's conquest, the Persians invaded Phoenician lands in 539 BCE, but the Macedonian invasion was much more devastating, especially for Tyre. The majority of the cities such as Sidon submitted automatically, unwilling to cause bloodshed against Alexander's vastly superior army. However, Tyre decided to take the invaders on at their own game but this backfired spectacularly as hoplites laid siege to the island city for seven months and massacred the population once they had overcome the fortifications. After the Macedonian decline, Phoenicia became a Roman state in 64 CE and developed a Hellenistic society and culture.

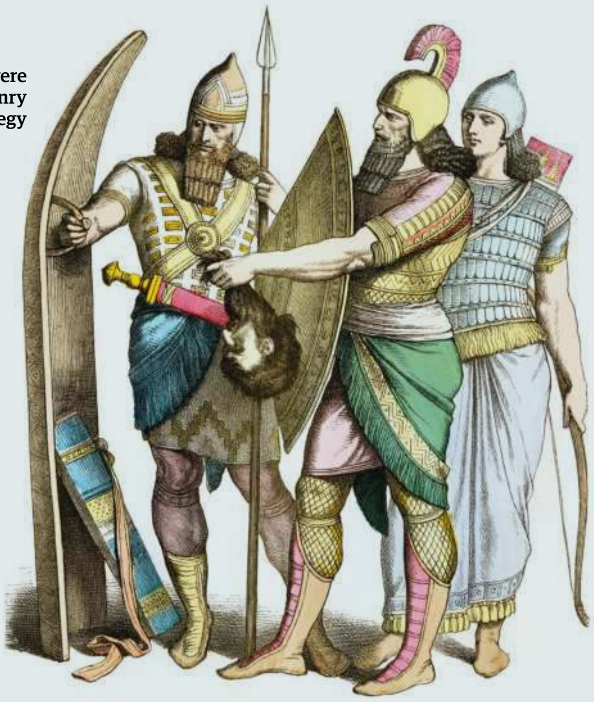
Dr Mark Woolmer

Dr Woolmer is a fellow in Ancient History in the Department of Classics and Ancient History and assistant principal of Collingwood College, Durham University.
The Phoenicians have long been considered a lost or forgotten civilisation due to the almost complete loss of their literary culture. None of the histories, chronicles, philosophical treaties, religious manuals or scientific texts have survived the ravages of time. In one of history's greatest ironies, the very civilisation responsible for transmitting the alphabet to the West has left virtually no written legacy. Compounding this problem is the fact that until recently, there had been no systematic excavations of Phoenician sites.

Phoenicians heavily influenced culture, trade and architecture



The Phoenician world was based around trade from their busy ports



Assyrians were innovators of weaponry and military strategy

ASSYRIA

Combining a strong military ethos with huge leaps in education, the Assyrians were a force to be reckoned with

05

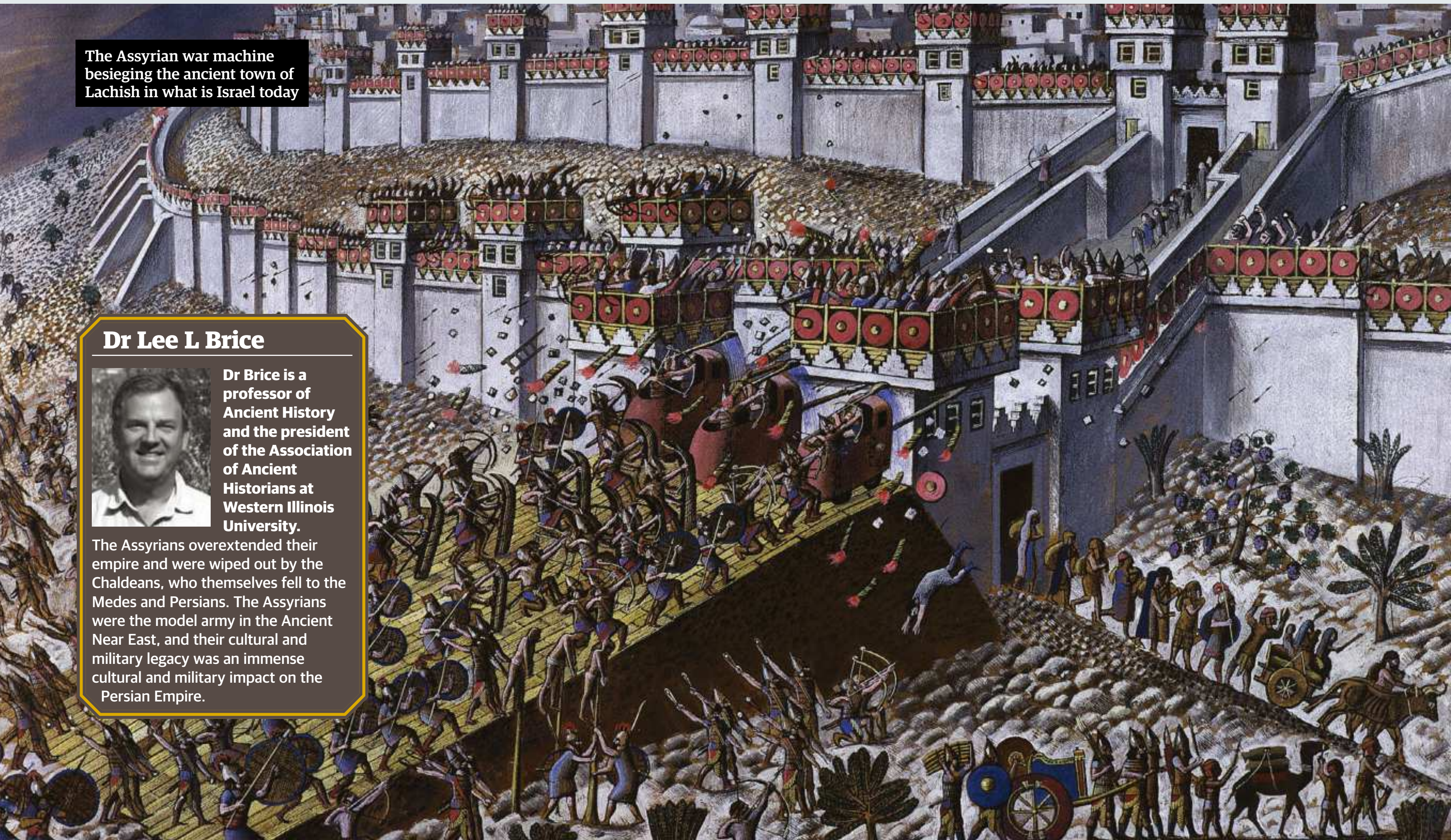
Where was it:
Iran and Syria
When did it exist:
2400 BCE - 1300 CE
Strengths: **Technological advances, iron weapons, emphasis on education**
Weaknesses: **Proximity to other strong empires, administration spread too thinly**
Amazing fact: **Assyria contained several zoos as one of their kings, Tiglath-Pileser, was obsessed with animals**

The Assyrians shared the area of Mesopotamia (Iraq, Turkey and Syria) with the Babylonians, but they could not have differed more. While in Babylon the kingdom was ruled by the priesthood, Assyrians were ruled by kings and generals. This allowed the Assyrians to become a much larger military power and they were able to expand their empire considerably. The benefactors of the rich and fertile land on the Arbel and Nineveh Plains, the Assyrians amassed a huge population who gathered in their largest cities, Arbel, Ashur and Nimrud. They spoke Akkadian and were some of the first peoples to record writings on stone tablets and later, parchment and papyrus.

The Assyrians were pioneers of animal domestication, pottery, controllable fire and iron smelting - it was the latter technology that gave their military a huge boost. Fighting enemies armed with bronze, the stronger iron weapons allowed them to conquer the Hittites, who were roundly defeated at the Battle of Nihriya in 1245 BCE. Assyrian policy for defeated powers was to not incorporate their people into their nation but deport them to ensure there was no rebellion under their rule. Exceptions were only made if the individual or group was believed to be of use to the greater Assyrian society, such as scholars. One of the Assyrians' greatest achievements was in education, as the School of Nisibis is believed to be the first-ever university, teaching theology, philosophy and medicine. These houses of education provided the first systematic lists of plants and animals, as well as progression in other areas, such as an early postal system.

The Assyrians are also attributed with building some of the first aqueducts and arches, hundreds of years before the Romans, and introducing the modern idea of keeping time. Pax-Assyria ruled the majority of Mesopotamia for approximately 1,800 years, where their cities were huge metropolises guarded by extensive fortifications. Unlike other settlements of the age, the Assyrians had a kingdom that was unified and not limited to separate city-states. Instead, imperial administration ruled the land as local governors reported to the central authority.

The final Assyrian demise is shrouded in mystery, but it is believed they entered a dark age in 1300 CE after constant wars with the Byzantine Empire. After their empire crumbled, their civilisation saw a mass influx of Jews and Arabs. Assyrians were primarily Christian, but after high taxes were put on this faith, they changed to Islam. This effectively ended the idea of being 'Assyrian'. As the Assyrians were ethnically distinct from both Arabs and Jews, this may be a contributing factor to their slip into relative obscurity.



The Assyrian war machine besieging the ancient town of Lachish in what is Israel today

Dr Lee L Brice

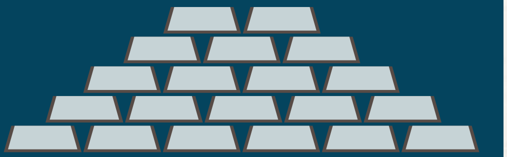
Dr Brice is a professor of Ancient History and the president of the Association of Ancient Historians at Western Illinois University.

The Assyrians overextended their empire and were wiped out by the Chaldeans, who themselves fell to the Medes and Persians. The Assyrians were the model army in the Ancient Near East, and their cultural and military legacy was an immense cultural and military impact on the Persian Empire.

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE IN NUMBERS

15 METRES

was the thickness of the walls surrounding its capital city



1 TON

of gold was seized during its invasion of Jerusalem

30,000

clay tablets were found in the ruins of an Assyrian library

200,000

The size of the empire's army at its strongest

2,100

gods made up the Mesopotamian pantheon

4 MILLION

people were deported by the Assyrians

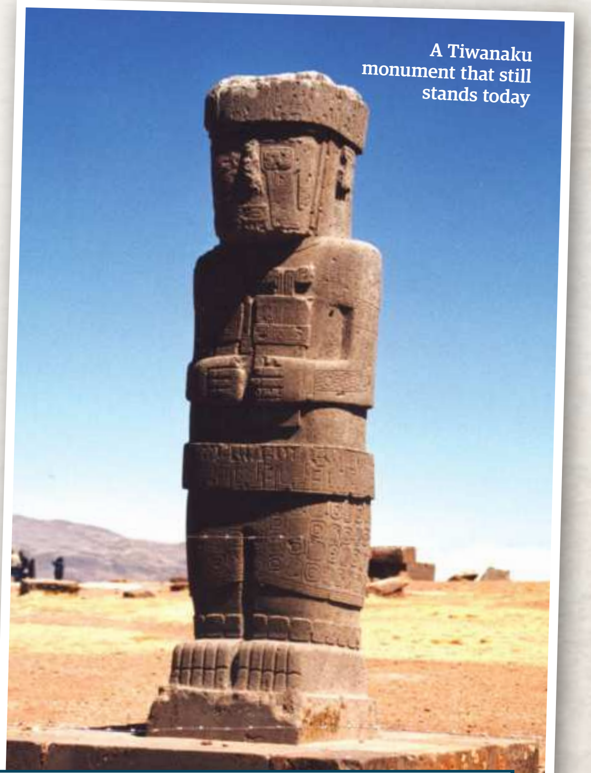
TIWANAKU

This civilisation proved you didn't need an army to survive

Where was it: **Bolivia**
When did it exist:
500-900
Strengths: **Good agricultural location, construction techniques, expert farmers**
Weaknesses: **No writing system, overuse of their farming land, no military presence**
Amazing fact: **Tiwanaku cities were so grand that when the Incas discovered them, they believed they were made by gods**

The most prominent civilisation to come out of Peru was the Incas, whose culture flourished from approximately 1200 until the Spanish conquest of 1532. However, before the Incas came the Tiwanaku tribes, who colonised both Chile and Peru. A multi-ethnic society who settled in the upper reaches of the Andes, the Tiwanaku are remembered for their many remarkable monuments that still stand today. The most famous of these were the Kalasasaya's Temple and the step pyramid of Akapana, which were used as a temple and observatory respectively. As well as these impressive structures, the Tiwanaku also had underground drainage and paved streets, with cities that were planned in a grid system.

Over 10,000 people lived in their capital city (also called Tiwanaku), which is believed to be one of the oldest cities in the world. Their society was aided by its base in the rich Titicaca basin, which had just the right mix of rainfall, food sources and land. Subsequently, the Tiwanaku became expert farmers and pioneered a method of farming known as 'flooded-raised field' agriculture, which used the effective system of irrigation. This well-fed population (there were over 50,000 agricultural fields in the capital) allowed the Tiwanaku to expand into many other areas of South America. The civilisation was at the peak of its powers in the 8th century, but it mysteriously ended in the 9th century. No one is quite sure why the Tiwanaku disappeared but is believed that they, as well as a similar culture known as the Wari, were victims of a dramatic shift in climate which devastated the crops and caused mass starvation. As they had no writing system and never engaged in war with Spanish conquistadors, the Tiwanaku are a true forgotten civilisation.



A Tiwanaku monument that still stands today

Which was the greatest?

Every civilisation on our list has its own merits and drawbacks, but the Assyrians were undoubtedly the most successful of the civilisations included as they had the largest empire and survived for the longest period of time. However, where would Mediterranean trade have been without the Phoenicians? Would Rome have still risen without the Etruscans? How long would the Minoans have lasted if they weren't damaged by two natural disasters?

The Tiwanaku could well be the 'true' forgotten civilisation as, out of all of our entries, they left the least amount of clues to their history and vanished under mysterious circumstances. Overall, it must be said that from our list, the greatest forgotten civilisation must be the Assyrians for their ability to harness an extensive and populous empire and the fact that some of their descendants still roam small pockets of the Middle East in search of a homeland.

The Aqar Quf ziggurat in modern-day Iraq was built by the Hittites

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ASIA

16 The Indus Valley Civilisation

20 The Akkadian Empire

24 The Mauryan Empire

26 Babylon 597 BCE

28 Secrets from Ancient China

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42 The Nabateans

44 The Three Kingdoms of Korea

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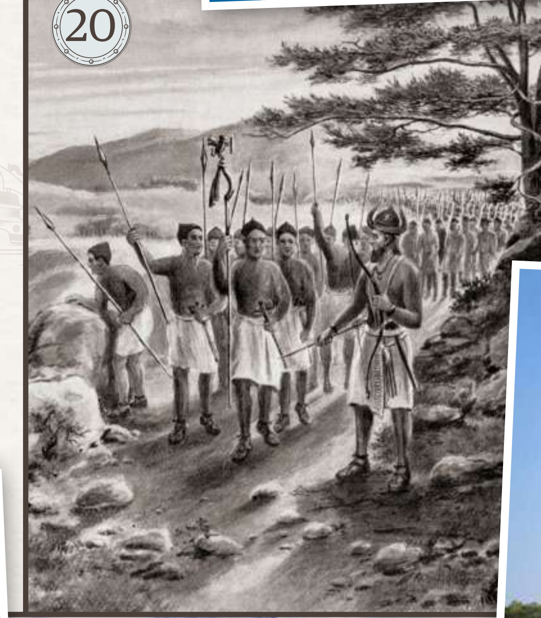
50 Rise and Fall of the Xiongnu



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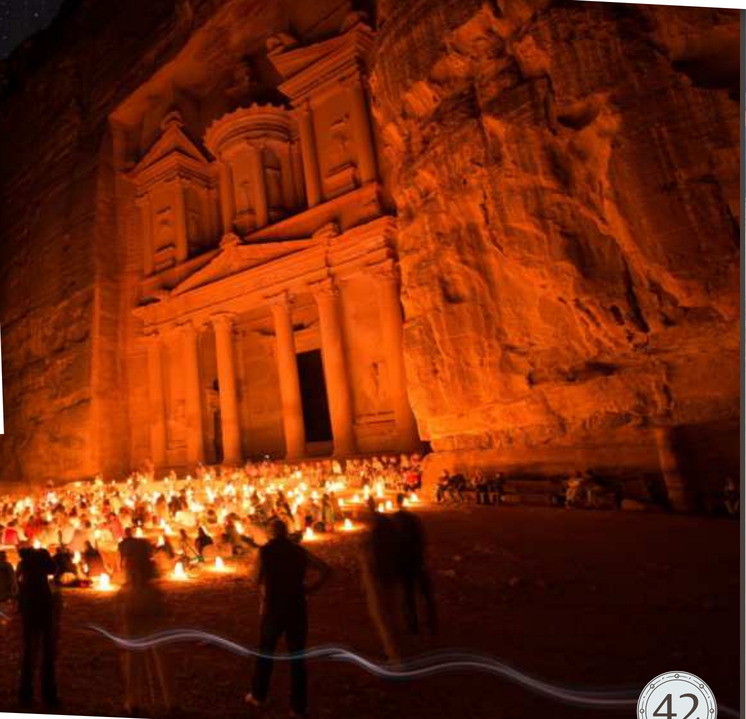
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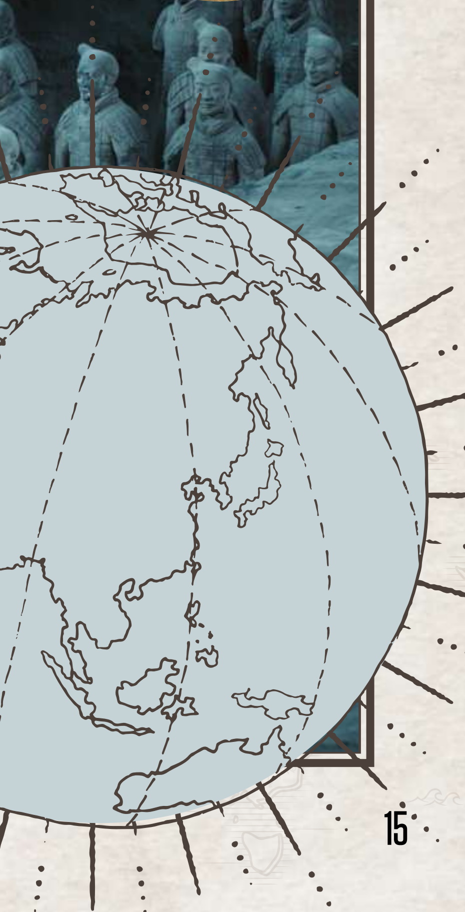
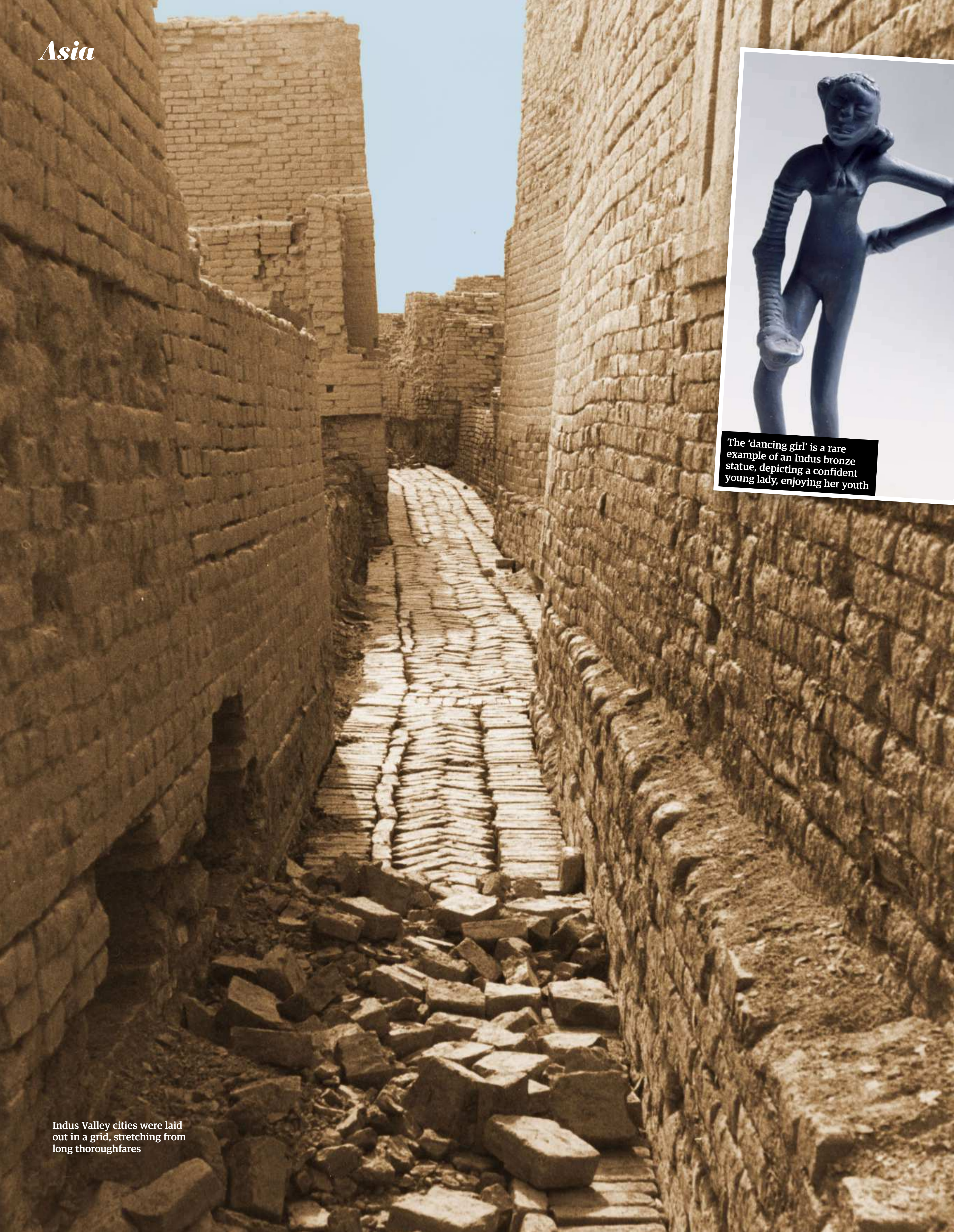



The 'dancing girl' is a rare example of an Indus bronze statue, depicting a confident young lady, enjoying her youth

Indus Valley cities were laid out in a grid, stretching from long thoroughfares

THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION

Cloaked in mystery, the Old World's largest civilisation pioneered grid urban planning and sewage systems, only to disappear completely for thousands of years, still waiting to be understood

• Written by Hareth Al Bustani •

In 1826, a British East India Company explorer encountered an ancient city, hitherto known only to the locals, and assumed to be around 1,500 years old. However, within 50 years, the ruins had been stripped of their fired bricks, which rail engineers had quarried for ballast. In the ensuing decades, archaeologists began to piece together the puzzle, unearthing a lost civilisation, far larger and older in scope than previously imagined. The city robbed of its bricks was Harappa, the power capital of the Old World's largest civilisation, the Indus Valley.

> While the civilisation had a writing system, it remains a mystery as all attempts to decipher it have failed

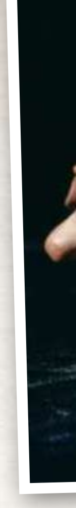
The vast civilisation began with the humblest of roots in around 3300 BCE, when villages sprouted along the flood plains of the parallel Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra Rivers. Drawing upon the region's spectacularly rich hunting and fishing grounds, the Indus soon began to amass high yields of wheat, barley and cotton, building granaries to store their sizable surplus. While previous cultures traded with Iran, Afghanistan and even Turkmenistan, the Indus Valley Civilisation established the first overseas trade route, across the Arabian Sea - helping its major urban centres amass power and wealth. At its peak, the civilisation stretched across more than 500,000 square miles, with 1,500 settlements clustered throughout northwest India, most of Pakistan and into Afghanistan.

By 2600, the Valley's larger settlements came to resemble state-level societies, with smaller outlying settlements resembling chiefdoms. While the vast majority of its residents lived in small peripheral villages, the most powerful cities existed as autonomous city-states. Though surrounded by enormous mud-brick and stone walls, conflict seemed to play, at most, a very minor role in Indus Valley culture, with few arrowheads or spears discovered among the ruins in the region. On the contrary, influence seems to have been exuded through the force of culture, as homogenised systems of urban planning, economy and society reverberated across a region that was twice the size of its counterparts in Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt.

The two largest settlements, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, were enormous, housing up to 50,000 inhabitants each. Due to Harappa's apparent pre-eminence, the Indus Valley Civilisation is often referred to as the Harappan Civilisation. Such cities boasted shared principles of urban planning, with a citadel of large public buildings, built atop a mound to the west, accompanied by a lower residential town to the east. Indus cities were built in a grid, forming parallelograms, with long thoroughfares running north to south and east to west - an urban-planning first. Uniformity was widespread across Indus settlements, down to brick sizes.

Streets were designed in accordance with wind direction, guiding a breeze through the city and ventilating fresh air into homes. Public drains ran through the middle of wide roads, complete with manholes to collect and remove waste. Built around central courtyards, complete with living rooms, private mud houses also featured elaborate indoor bathing and toilet facilities, lined with ceramic tiles. Connecting to the public drains, their plumbing systems were not only advanced compared to their contemporaries, but, in many cases, superior to those found in Indian and Pakistani homes today.

Municipalities also offered public restrooms, with Harappa and Mohenjo-daro both housing large public baths many centuries before the Romans, their central locations indicating a fixation on



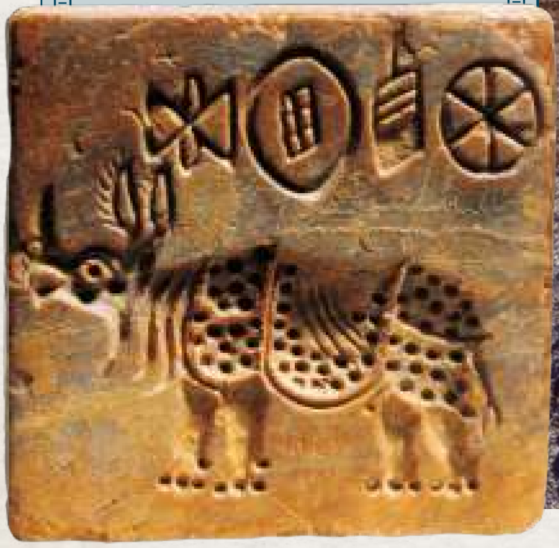
> "While villagers lived simple lives, cities were vibrant centres of culture, trade and industry"

The secret script

Still undeciphered, the Indus script may just be the key to unlocking the civilisation's greatest secrets

The Indus Valley Civilisation developed an intricate writing script, depicting hundreds of logographic visual symbols: dots, lines, geometric shapes, humans and animal forms. There seem to have been between 300 and 700 symbols, half of which were basic, with many compounds – indicating that it may have been a logosyllabic script, where each symbol represents a syllable rather than a single letter. Written from right to left, in rows from the top down, the endemic script adorned seals and trade goods, perhaps conveying ownership information, a protective invocation, or a dedication. It was also imposed on wooden signage, either for administrative purposes, to identify houses or to bless travellers.

Across the Indus Valley, it appears that the rules of language, sentence structure and grammar were homogenous. Though various attempts have been made to decipher it, in the absence of a figurative Rosetta Stone, none have succeeded. Compounding the problem, most incidences of the script are only eight symbols long, with the longest just 17. Another difficulty is in trying to infer pictorial meaning; where one scholar sees a snake, another sees a seated man. The disappearance of the language is perhaps even more bewildering than that of its parent civilisation, and should the code ever be cracked, would unshroud many a mystery.

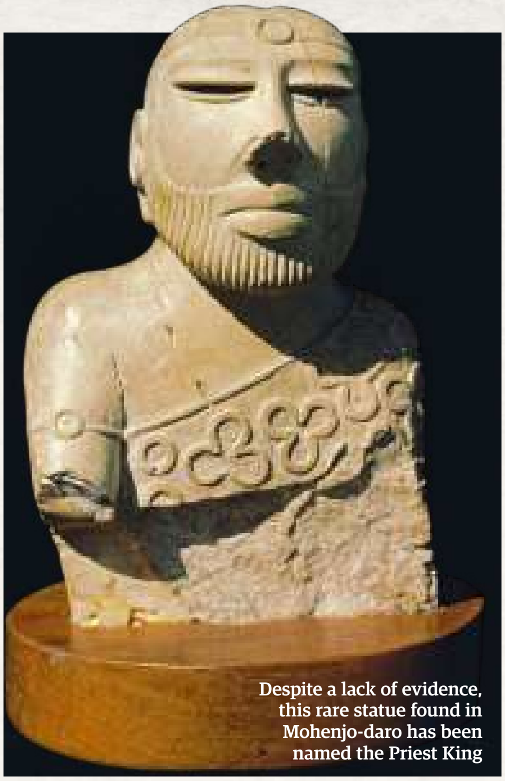


An Indus Valley seal is adorned with indecipherable symbols, written from right to left

cleanliness beyond simple hygiene. This implies that ritual purity might have played a crucial role in the Harappan psyche, with dirt and impurity considered to be unholy – a precursor to later Hindu traditions.

Power appears to have been decentralised in the cities, shared among various groups of occupational elites ranging from merchants and ritualists to those in control of land and livestock. However, uniformity across residential and burial areas indicates that, whether one was a priest, warrior, peasant, trader or artisan, there was a higher fluidity of social status that would later become synonymous with the varna or caste systems. Most Indus were given the same funerary rites – placed in a coffin or wrapped in a shroud, and buried atop grave furniture; pottery, jewellery, ornaments and personal artefacts, such as copper mirrors or mother-of-pearl shells. Although these objects certainly seem to demonstrate a belief in the afterlife, the Harrapans' relatively small cemeteries indicate that not everyone was buried; others may have been cremated.

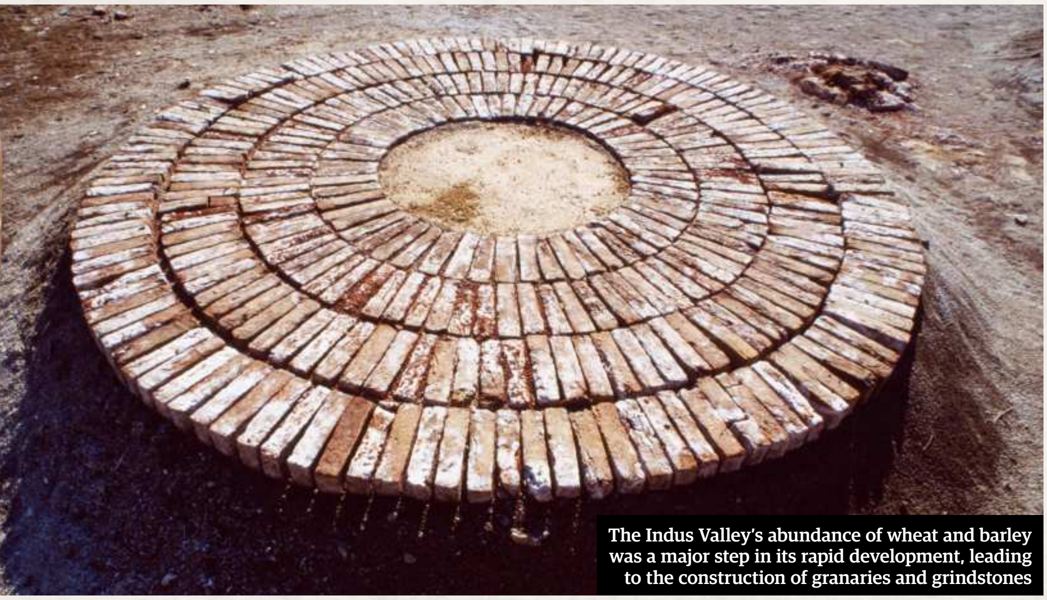
While villagers lived relatively simple lives, herding animals and growing crops, major cities were vibrant centres of culture, trade and industry. Artisans were masters of metalwork, lapidary and ceramics, producing ornaments and tools to use and export to distant lands. Metalsmiths worked with both copper and bronze, creating casts by pouring molten metal into moulds, and adding tin or arsenic to remove bubbles. In this way, they crafted everything from arrowheads and axes to harpoons and small bottles. They also manufactured textiles, using their natural abundance of high-quality cotton.



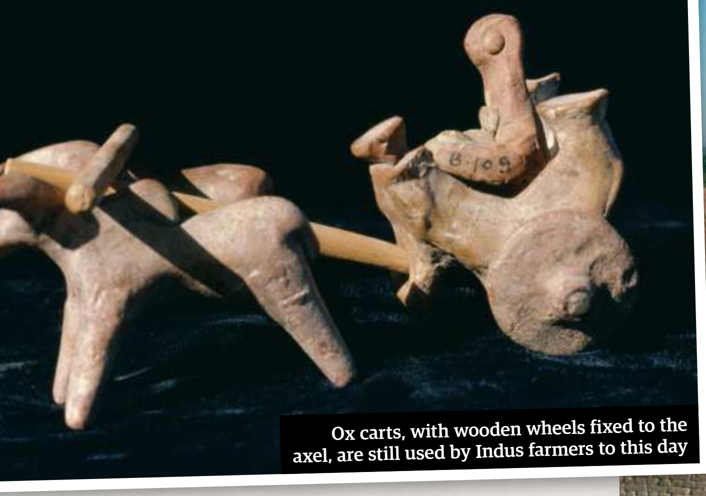
Despite a lack of evidence, this rare statue found in Mohenjo-daro has been named the Priest King

Meanwhile, potters mass-produced wares in circular kilns, with a stokehole and furnace placed beneath a perforated floor, covered by a dome ceiling. These were primarily designed with function in mind, with potters producing goblets, cups, pans and many other utilitarian objects, using a base of pinkish river clay. They made use of efflorescence, a process that ensures the interior core and glaze are exactly the same colour, while bonding the glaze to the body. Decorated pottery featured bright-red backgrounds, with black designs painted atop – depicting both geometric and naturalistic imagery, such as a fisherman carrying his nets and pole, with a fish and turtle by his feet.

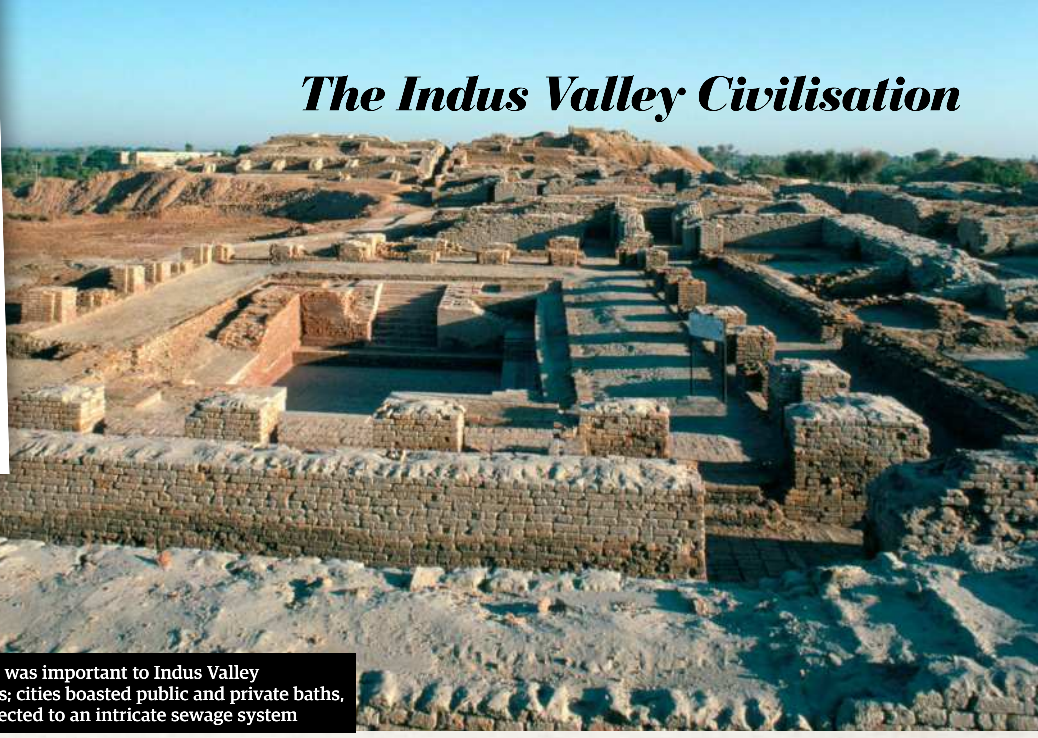
While early Indus settlers made beads from seashells, now they had become increasingly resourceful, crafting beads from gemstones and



The Indus Valley's abundance of wheat and barley was a major step in its rapid development, leading to the construction of granaries and grindstones



Ox carts, with wooden wheels fixed to the axel, are still used by Indus farmers to this day



Hygiene was important to Indus Valley residents; cities boasted public and private baths, all connected to an intricate sewage system

even gold. Artisans also produced a unique, compact, glassy faience in an assortment of colours. They forged tools, jewellery and dice from ivory, and tanned animal hides for leather for both clothing and sails.

Though the Indus did not produce much fine art, among a series of limestone statues found at Mohenjo-daro is a particularly curious piece. Just over 17 centimetres high, it depicts a bearded man wearing a robe with one shoulder exposed – a man some have speculated was a Priest King. Bronze statues were even rarer, most notably the renowned 'dancing girl', portraying a woman wearing only bangles on her arm and a necklace, in the throes of dance. It is particularly remarkable, not just in its form, but for its embrace of dance and sensuality.

Across the Indus Valley, settlements traded in standardised weights – many found as far as Oman and Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamians also imported onions, cotton, hardwoods, pearls, carnelian, peacocks and monkeys, in return exporting raw materials, copper, gold, woollen items and perfumes to the Indus Valley. While Indus Valley traders lived in Mesopotamia, Mesopotamians did not settle the other way, suggesting a somewhat closed-off society.

Archaeologists have also uncovered hundreds of small soapstone seals, used to stamp designs and inscriptions into soft clay – most likely used by merchants, in the same manner of a signet ring. The most widespread iconography is that of a unicorn, resembling a cross between a humpless bull and an antelope, with long legs and exaggerated genitals. Another depicts what may be a male deity, often referred to as Shiva Pashupati, Lord of the Beasts. Wearing a headdress of buffalo horns with a pipal tree growing from it – the same tree Buddha was said to have achieved enlightenment under – he sits in the lotus position, symbolising meditation and introspection, sometimes appearing with three faces, surrounded by animals, forming a mandala. Other seals feature bulls, baboons, elephants, rhinos, tigers and other animals that were native to the region, often depicted as males.

Terracotta figurines seem to depict a mother goddess with exaggerated features of femininity

Terracotta figurines, meanwhile, depict women, with special attention drawn to their prominent hips, thighs, breasts and showy hairstyles. They seem to symbolise the worship of a mother goddess, perhaps used ritualistically in conjunction with an animist spiritual view. Cattle bones found at the fire altars of Kalibangan and Rakhigarhi indicate that perhaps these were offered in sacrifice.

With a lack of temples, religious ceremonies were most likely conducted in the open, and decentralised worship practiced at home. It is also possible that while the mass of culture was homogenised in the larger cities, even the distant rural Indus may have played a significant role in tweaking their culture and traditions.

The Indus Valley Civilisation began to experience a rapid decline from 1900 BCE, with settlements becoming increasingly isolated from one another, forced to rely on their own resources and local trade networks. Uniformity slipped away from town planning, craftsmanship and virtually all other aspects of life. As the civilisation went into freefall, drains fell into disrepair, houses were built of inferior quality using salvaged bricks, and heavy industry splintered off into little workshops. In Mohenjo-daro, as the living took to burying their valuables, the dead were given unceremonious send-offs in derelict houses and streets.

Over the next 500 years, the settlements withered and disappeared, with a gradual exodus to new settlements in nearby Gujarat, the Kachi Plain and east Punjab. Here, despite slipping into obscurity, Indus Valley bead making, metallurgy, ceramic production, glazed faience and architecture were all kept alive. After a long hiatus, traditional traders have re-embraced the Harrapan standardised use of weights, and Indus farmers still use the same wooden-wheeled ox carts to this day. However, with the Indus writing system still undeciphered, the civilisation's true cultural legacy remains shrouded in mystery, patiently waiting to be discovered.

Artisans crafted a variety of beads, from seashells, gemstones and an innovative form of glassy faience

After a long day's work in the fields, or at the kiln, Harappans enjoyed playing board games

© Getty Images

THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE

Discover the spectacular rise and rapid fall of the world's first empire

Written by Scott Reeves

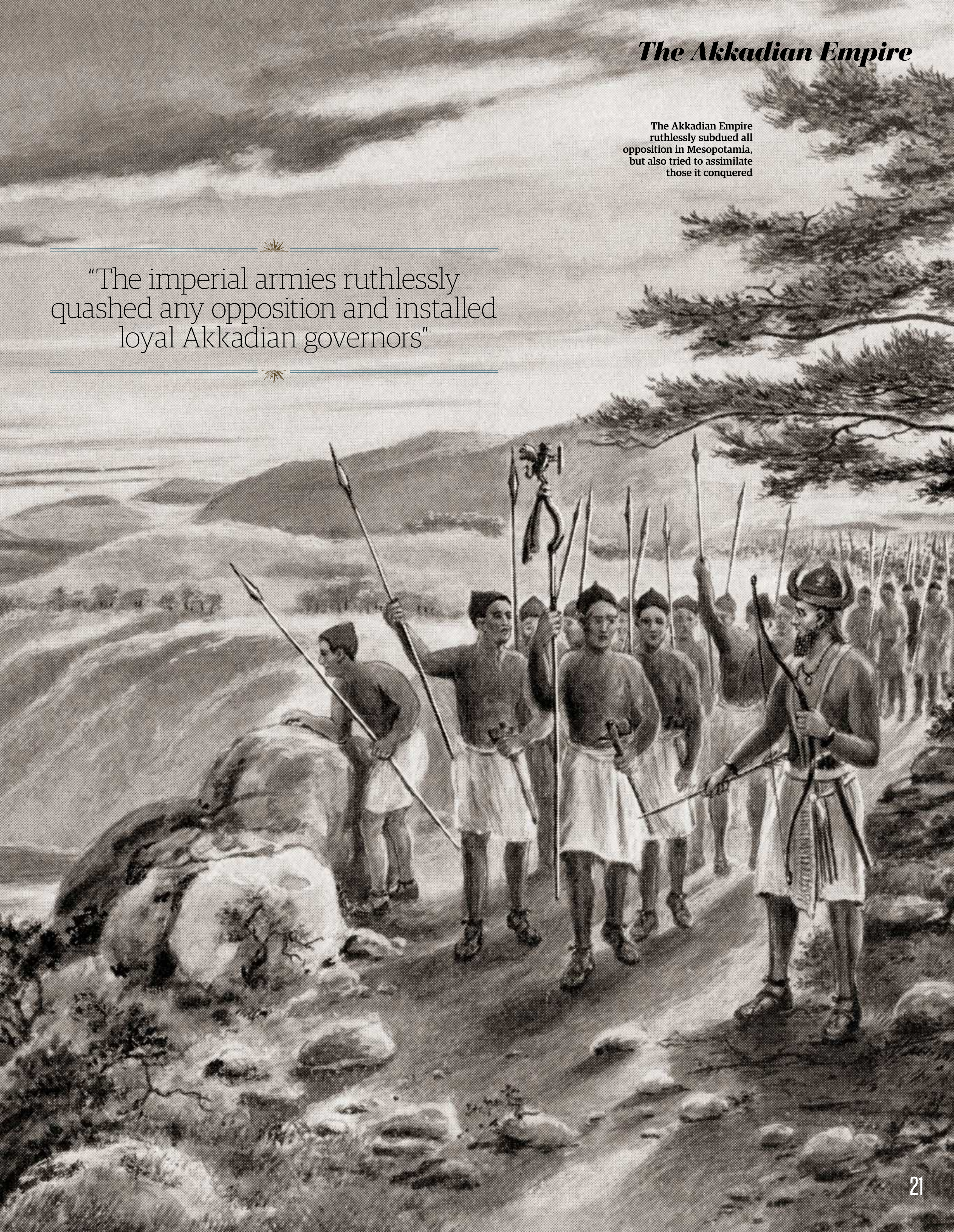
When the 5,000-strong army of Sargon of Akkad managed to conquer the Sumerian city of Uruk - once the biggest in the world, with a population ten times larger than the army that faced it - it was a milestone moment in world history. The balance of power between the kingdoms of Akkad and Sumer had shifted, allowing Sargon to capture 34 more Sumerian cities and his Sumerian fellow monarch, Lugal-Zage-Si. In conquering his neighbour to create a multi-ethnic territory ruled by a central government, Sargon had created the world's first empire in what is mostly modern-day Iraq.

Sargon the Great's rise to power was spectacular. Originally a cupbearer to the king of Kish, he was subsequently appointed to the position of gardener, which gave him the vital responsibility of clearing the irrigation canals that allowed enough food to be grown in the hot Mesopotamian climate. This gave Sargon access to a disciplined corps of workers who became the foundation of a personal army, eventually allowing him to seize the throne in 2334 BCE.

Sargon was ruler of one of several kingdoms throughout Mesopotamia, but he had higher ambitions. Aside from conquering his Sumerian rival to the south, he embarked on a series of invasions of nearby territory, seizing land and amalgamating it into an empire that he ruled from his capital, Akkad. His armies ventured westwards into Syria and Canaan, reaching the Mediterranean Sea and perhaps even stretching across the water to Cyprus. To the east, the Elamite cities and kingdoms of modern Iran came under Akkadian control. To the north, Sargon claimed land as far as the mountains of Anatolia (modern Turkey), while to the south his influence reached to Magan (modern Oman).

Sargon manipulated religious affairs by appointing his daughter high priestess of Inanna at Ur

However, the outposts of the Akkadian Empire did not always accept Sargon's rule without question. Rebellions flared in Elam and Assyria, but the imperial armies ruthlessly quashed any opposition and installed loyal Akkadian governors to control those they vanquished.



The Akkadian Empire ruthlessly subdued all opposition in Mesopotamia, but also tried to assimilate those it conquered

> "The imperial armies ruthlessly quashed any opposition and installed loyal Akkadian governors"

That Sargon was able to build and maintain a grip on such a vast domain was undoubtedly helped by his longevity - he sat on the throne for 56 years - but the empire continued to grow under his successors. Some degree of instability was inevitable after the death of a king who had ruled so successfully for so long, but two of Sargon's sons, Rimush and Manishtushu, faced down further revolts and rebellions. Indeed, both Rimush and Manishtushu actually suffered more from internal threats than from the wider empire - both were assassinated by courtiers in palace conspiracies.

By the time Naram-Sin, Manishtushu's son and successor, acceded the throne in 2254 BCE, the Akkadian Empire was ready to resume a policy of conquest. The Syrian kingdoms of Ebla and Armanum fell to the new king, while his forces ventured further into Anatolia and battled the Hittites. Naram-Sin's 36 years on the throne saw the empire reach its greatest extent and coincided with a second golden age of conquest.

Yet the Akkadian Empire was more than just a powerful military force - it had a sophisticated economy, although it was almost entirely dependent upon agriculture. Two belts of fertile land made it the breadbasket of the region; one in northern Mesopotamia that was fed by rainfall, and one in the south that relied upon irrigation canals to remain productive. Grain and oil rations were controlled by the state and distributed in

The battleground of empires

Uncover Mesopotamia, the land that was fought over by a succession of ancient empires

Conflict in Iraq is, unfortunately, nothing new. The brief flourishing of the Akkadian Empire in Mesopotamia was followed by a Dark Age under the Gutians, with few written documents to shine a light on the era. However, the peoples of the former Akkadian Empire eventually coalesced into two long-lived nations: Assyria in the north and Babylonia in the south.

Babylon fell in 539 BCE, when it was conquered by the Achaemenid Empire – the first of the Persian incursions from the east. The next set of invaders came from the west in the form of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE, after whose death Mesopotamia became part of the Greek Seleucid Empire.

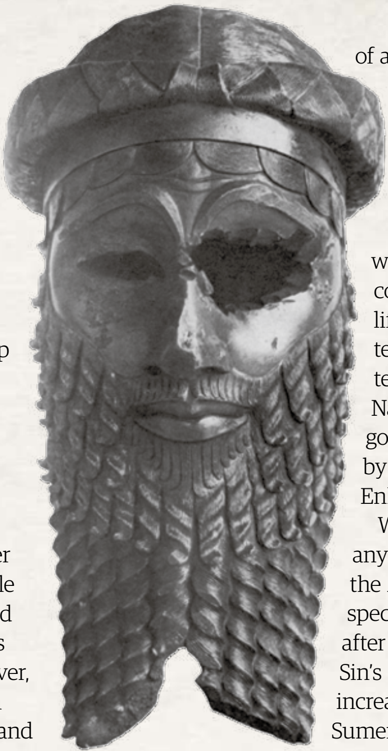
By 150 BCE, the pendulum had swung back to the east as Mesopotamia came under the control of the Parthian Empire. The fertile land between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers was a scene of conflict between Romans and Parthians for centuries, eventually being split between Roman Byzantines in the west and Sassanid Persians in the east until the Muslim conquest of the Levant in the first half of the 7th century. Barring Mongol invasions, the battleground of empires was finally at peace until the 20th century.

Perhaps the most famous Mesopotamian ruler, Hammurabi of Babylon controlled the region 500 years after the Akkadian Empire

Cylinder seals, such as this one depicting a seated god of water and wisdom, were used to seal letters in the Akkadian postal system standardised vessels. Where shortages occurred in one area, another would be able to make up the shortfall.

Taxes could be paid either in produce or in kind by labouring on public projects, such as building city walls and temples or carrying out the vital autumnal clearance of irrigation ditches. Nomadic farmers could graze sheep and goats near the canals but had to pay a levy in wool, meat, milk and cheese.

Although the Akkadian Empire generally benefited from a surplus of foodstuffs, it was short of other resources, particularly metal, timber and stone. A desire to secure reliable supplies of these in part contributed to Akkadian conquests. The Taurus Mountains of Anatolia provided silver, while copper ore could be found in Magan, lapis lazuli in Afghanistan and timber in Lebanon.


This life-size bronze head housed in the National Museum of Iraq is thought to depict either Sargon or Naram-Sin

In order to secure their family's place on the throne, the Akkadian monarchs made full use of their wider family as a strategic network of control. They installed their sons as provincial governors and married their daughters to other rulers of imperial territory. Two daughters of Sargon and Naram-Sin were also appointed as high priestesses to Sin, meaning that their family's power would be felt as far south as the influential Sumerian temple complex of Ur.

The Akkadians also attempted to assimilate their conquests to create a single, consolidated nation. Akkadian became the primary language of Mesopotamia, although many of its people were bilingual and continued to speak Sumerian. Communication across the empire was possible through a road network that also supported a postal service. Clay tablets inscribed with Akkadian script were wrapped in outer clay envelopes marked with the name and address of the recipient and the seal of the sender; only the intended recipient was supposed to break the envelope to reveal the contents. A calendar based on year names, where each year of a reign was named after an event performed by the king, was adopted across Mesopotamia.

What we don't know a great deal about, however, is the capital itself. The location of Akkad is still shrouded in mystery. The name 'Akkad' does not derive from the Akkadian language, suggesting that the city existed prior to Sargon and the rise of his empire. The most likely site is on the Tigris River, somewhere between the modern cities of Samarra and Baghdad – however, that still leaves more than 80 miles to explore.

Wherever his palace was located, such was Naram-Sin's power as the self-titled king of the Four Quarters that he was elevated to the status of a god and granted his own temple establishment. The deification of a ruler was not new – it had happened to Gilgamesh, who had ruled as king of Urk a few centuries previously – but it was the first time a king was considered a god during his lifetime. However, an ancient text called the Curse of Agade tells of a king, thought to be Naram-Sin, who angered the gods through his deification and by tearing down the Temple of Enlil in Nippur.

Whether or not there was any divine retribution involved, the Akkadian Empire collapsed spectacularly just 64 years after Naram-Sin's death. Naram-Sin's son, Shar-Kali-Sharri, faced increasing raids from the Guti in Sumeria. These nomadic people lived in the Zagros Mountains and proved stubbornly determined to carry out hit-and-run raids against Akkadian targets. Faced with a new type of enemy who did not have a city-state base that could fall to the Akkadian army, the Guti slowly crippled the Akkadian economy. High taxes were imposed to pay for ongoing military campaigns against the Guti, leading to unrest and rebellion in the rest of the empire.

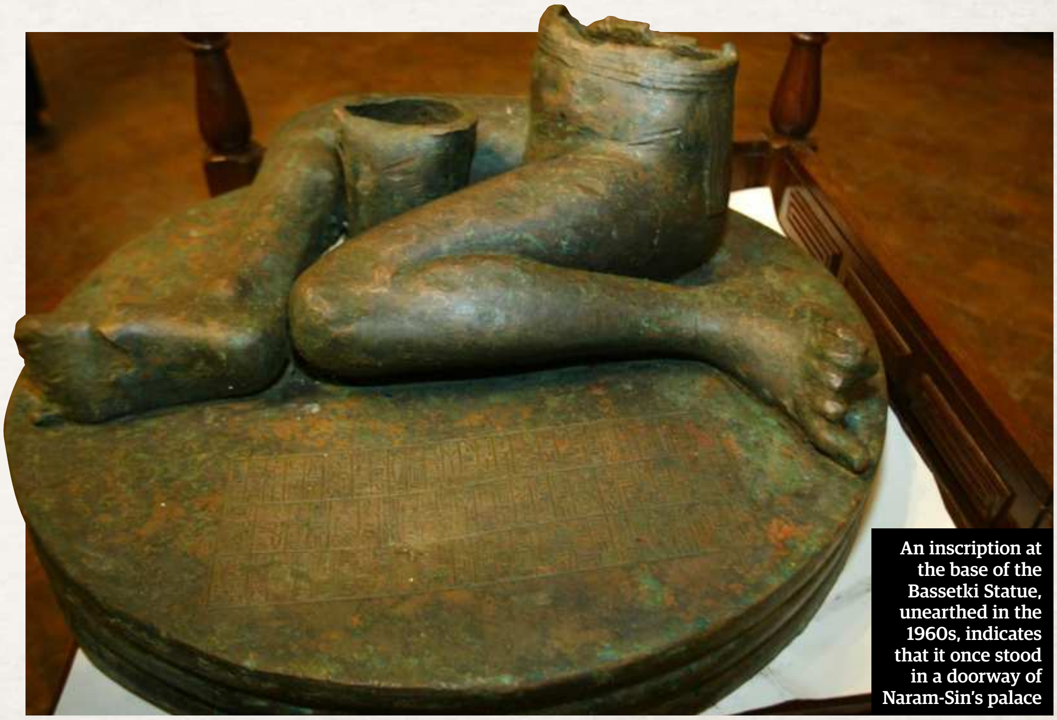
By the time Shar-Kali-Sharri died without an heir, the Akkadian Empire had fallen back to a rump around the capital and three years of anarchy left the throne unclaimed. The civil war was won by Dudu, who was succeeded by his son, Shu-Turul. However, neither king was able to prevent the eventual loss of Akkad to the Guti.

One explanation for the sudden collapse of the once-great empire was that it relied on personal leadership. Sargon and Naram-Sin may have had the capability of building and holding onto vast territories, but the other kings who sat on the throne did not have the same aptitude. However, some scientists have suggested an alternative explanation – that the final years of the Akkadian period coincided with a long drought caused by declining rainfall.

Archaeological evidence indicates that several cities in Sumer were abandoned in the late Akkadian period. Excavations at Tell Leilan in Syria show that massive city walls and a temple were built when times were good, but that soon after all trace of human activity in the city of 28,000 people disappeared. Soil samples indicate that the fine sand covered the ground with no trace of the earthworm activity usually found in fertile soil. At a similar time, the nearby city of Tell Brak shrank in size by 75 per cent.

If a similar story played out across Mesopotamia, the economy of the Akkadian Empire would have gone into freefall. Agrarian output would have plummeted and trade would have collapsed as people moved away from urban areas in a desperate search for reliable water. Centralised control of a vast empire became impossible and loyalty to Akkad would have evaporated as quickly as the water.

Whatever the cause of its spectacular collapse, the Akkadian Empire remains the world's first; a brief but historic milestone. It makes Sargon the forebear of later illustrious emperors including Augustus and Genghis Khan – not a bad achievement for a former royal cupbearer.


An inscription at the base of the Bassetki Statue, unearthed in the 1960s, indicates that it once stood in a doorway of Naram-Sin's palace

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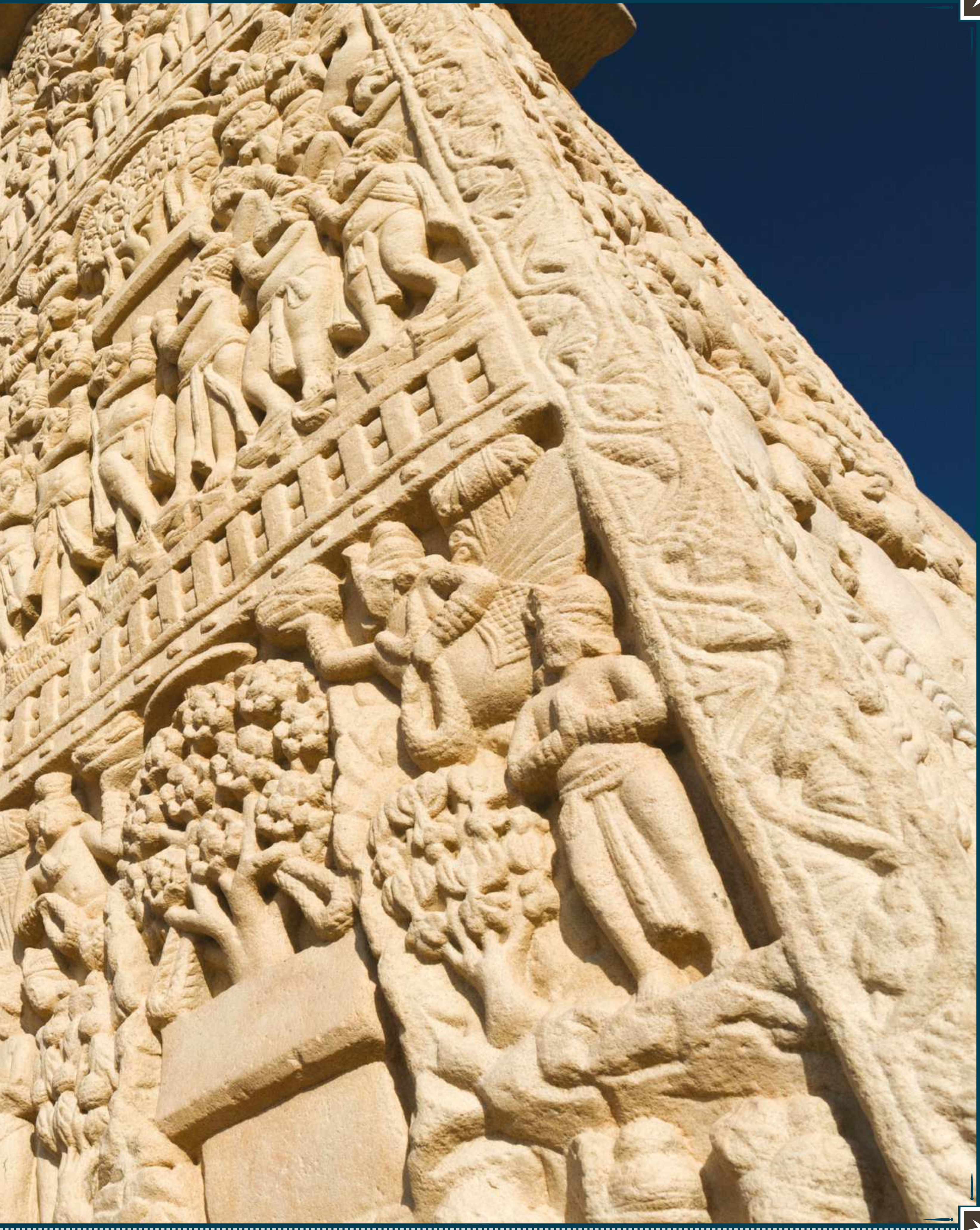
The Mauryan Empire

For 136 years, the Indian subcontinent was ruled by a powerful Iron-Age dynasty that had been established by Chandragupta Maurya. Reaching its peak under his grandson Ashoka, who built the splendid Buddhist temple complex at Sanchi that is pictured here, the Mauryan Empire's population of 50 million makes it one of the largest in antiquity.



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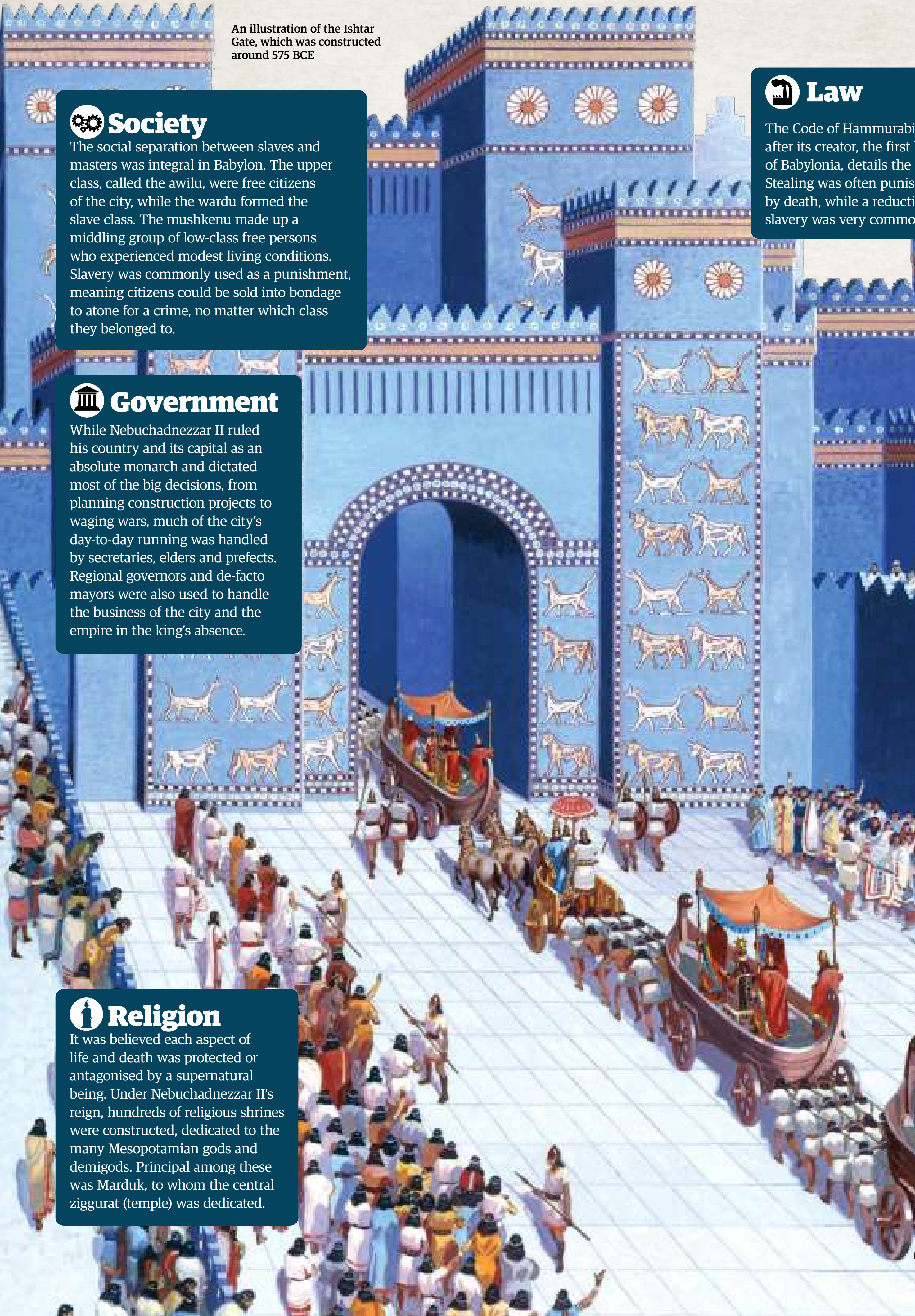


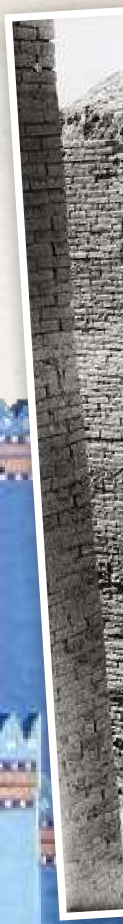
An illustration of the Ishtar Gate, which was constructed around 575 BCE

Society

The social separation between slaves and masters was integral in Babylon. The upper class, called the awilu, were free citizens of the city, while the wardu formed the slave class. The mushkenu made up a middling group of low-class free persons who experienced modest living conditions. Slavery was commonly used as a punishment, meaning citizens could be sold into bondage to atone for a crime, no matter which class they belonged to.

Law

The Code of Hammurabi, named after its creator, the first king of Babylonia, details the law. Stealing was often punishable by death, while a reduction to slavery was very common.



Government

While Nebuchadnezzar II ruled his country and its capital as an absolute monarch and dictated most of the big decisions, from planning construction projects to waging wars, much of the city's day-to-day running was handled by secretaries, elders and prefects. Regional governors and de-facto mayors were also used to handle the business of the city and the empire in the king's absence.

Religion

It was believed each aspect of life and death was protected or antagonised by a supernatural being. Under Nebuchadnezzar II's reign, hundreds of religious shrines were constructed, dedicated to the many Mesopotamian gods and demigods. Principal among these was Marduk, to whom the central ziggurat (temple) was dedicated.

BABYLON 597 BCE

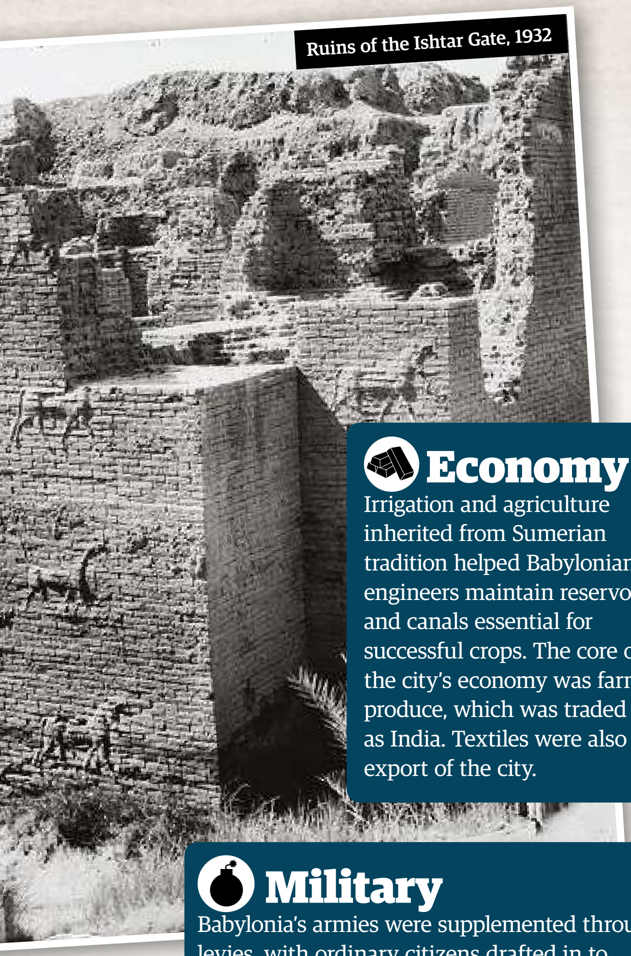
The infamous capital of Mesopotamia's most prolific ancient empire was home to law, riches and a powerful king

Written by Tim Williamson

A name synonymous with wealth and decadence in the ancient world, for a long time Babylon was at the centre of the largest empire in the region of Mesopotamia and a jewel of civilisation. Rumoured as the architect of the supposed Hanging Gardens, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, King Nebuchadnezzar II ruled during the most prosperous period of Babylonia's rich history. His military conquests expanded the empire as far as Egypt and saw him sack Jerusalem, destroying the First Temple and enslaving most of its population in 597 BCE.

This military success brought the spoils of war back to the capital city of the empire, which thrived from the king's ambitious construction projects. During his reign, Nebuchadnezzar II had new walls built for the city, as well as shrines, temples and an improved network of canals to increase the productivity of the farmland.

However, this golden period in Babylon's history would prove to be its peak and within the following centuries, the empire and its main city would be invaded by Persian, Greek and Muslim conquerors. Today, in modern-day Iraq, only ruins remain of this once-glorious capital.



Ruins of the Ishtar Gate, 1932

Economy

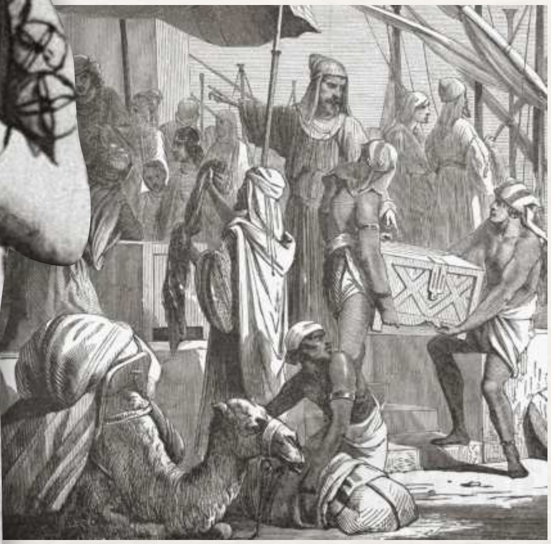
Irrigation and agriculture inherited from Sumerian tradition helped Babylonian engineers maintain reservoirs and canals essential for successful crops. The core of the city's economy was farm produce, which was traded as far as India. Textiles were also a key export of the city.

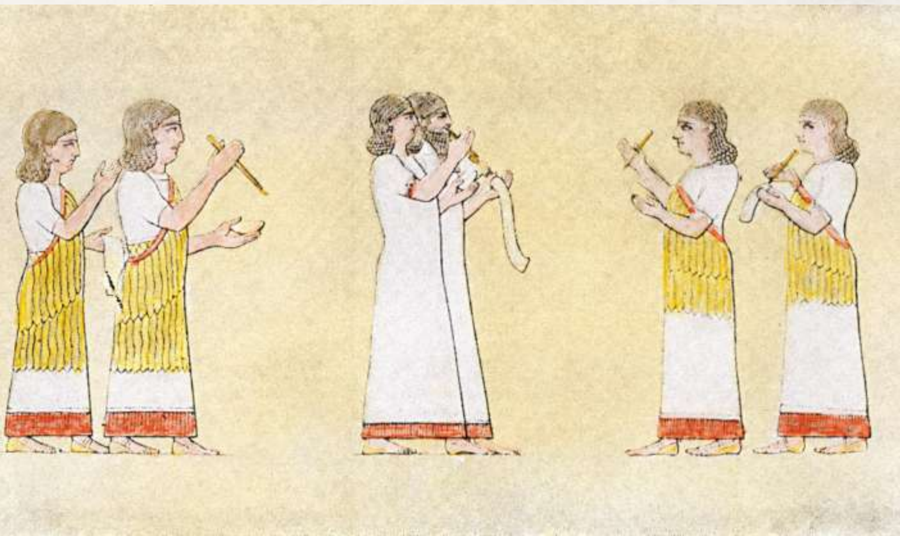
Military

Babylonia's armies were supplemented through levies, with ordinary citizens drafted in to serve as archers or slingers for periods of time. Nebuchadnezzar II would lead his armies surrounded by officers in grand chariots, guards on horseback and members of his court.

Education

While vast portions of the population were illiterate, the administrative arms of the courts and the government were well-read and could use the ancient cuneiform system of writing. As part of his training, a scribe or secretary would repeatedly copy out lists of words, phrases and whole passages in both Babylonian and Sumerian to perfect his writing.





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ASIA

SECRETS FROM ANCIENT CHINA

A giant tomb-mound and an army of clay soldiers protect the body of China's first emperor. Scholars have solved many mysteries - but many more remain

Written by John Man

March, 1974. Orchards and fields near Xian, north-central China. In the background is a conical hill. We're in an orchard, but the trees are bare and the grass is dusty. There's a drought. Five peasants, the Yang brothers, are digging a well. They are two metres down, taking turns to dig while the others haul out soil in baskets. Suddenly the one in the pit, Yang Zhefa, shouts: "An earth-god!"

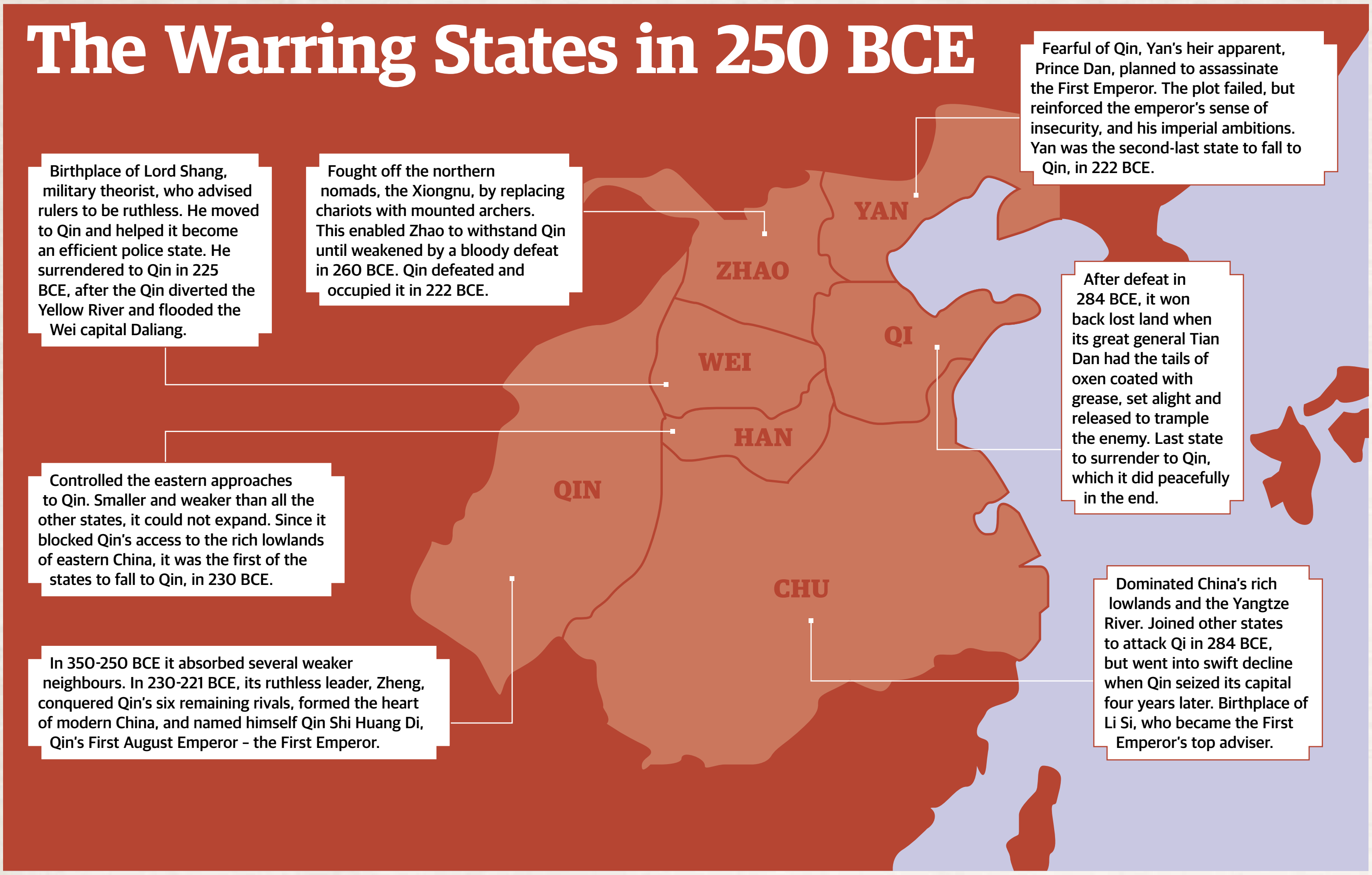
Sticking out of the soil is a head made of clay – it has two eyes, long hair tied in a bun and a moustache. This is bad luck, because it is underground, where the dead live. The men toss the head aside and keep digging, but some local kids see it and throw stones at it. A few adults arrive. An old woman picks up the head, takes it home and puts it on her table. Meanwhile, the Yang brothers make other finds: bricks, bits of bronze and some arrowheads.

A month later, a 24-year-old archaeologist named Zhao Kangmin, who was working in a local museum, hears about the finds. He gets on his bike, rides to the orchard and finds the Yangs, still busy on their well. By now there are more clay bits on their heap of rubbish: legs, arms, two more heads. He takes charge of matters and has the finds brought to his museum in nearby Lintong. He guesses they are important, because he knows the historical background.

Over 2,000 years ago, this was the heartland of the state known as Qin (pronounced Chin). That hill in the background, a giant pyramid of earth, was the tomb of the emperor who united China's warring states into a single nation. Zhao, like most educated people, knew all about the First Emperor, because the story of his rise was told in dramatic terms by Sima Qian, one of China's greatest historians, who was writing a century after the events he describes.

Qin had been one of seven warring states, all with their own armies and systems of government, rivalling each other. But Qin had made itself the most powerful by becoming a military dictatorship, a police state in which the ruler

The Warring States in 250 BCE



Fearful of Qin, Yan's heir apparent, Prince Dan, planned to assassinate the First Emperor. The plot failed, but reinforced the emperor's sense of insecurity, and his imperial ambitions. Yan was the second-last state to fall to Qin, in 222 BCE.

Birthplace of Lord Shang, military theorist, who advised rulers to be ruthless. He moved to Qin and helped it become an efficient police state. He surrendered to Qin in 225 BCE, after the Qin diverted the Yellow River and flooded the Wei capital Daliang.

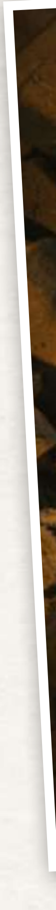
Fought off the northern nomads, the Xiongnu, by replacing chariots with mounted archers. This enabled Zhao to withstand Qin until weakened by a bloody defeat in 260 BCE. Qin defeated and occupied it in 222 BCE.

After defeat in 284 BCE, it won back lost land when its great general Tian Dan had the tails of oxen coated with grease, set alight and released to trample the enemy. Last state to surrender to Qin, which it did peacefully in the end.

Controlled the eastern approaches to Qin. Smaller and weaker than all the other states, it could not expand. Since it blocked Qin's access to the rich lowlands of eastern China, it was the first of the states to fall to Qin, in 230 BCE.

In 350-250 BCE it absorbed several weaker neighbours. In 230-221 BCE, its ruthless leader, Zheng, conquered Qin's six remaining rivals, formed the heart of modern China, and named himself Qin Shi Huang Di, Qin's First August Emperor – the First Emperor.

Dominated China's rich lowlands and the Yangtze River. Joined other states to attack Qi in 284 BCE, but went into swift decline when Qin seized its capital four years later. Birthplace of Li Si, who became the First Emperor's top adviser.



> "These record cruel punishments, including being torn apart by carriages"

> Ancient China is known for being the birthplace of Confucius, the father of Confucianism philosophy

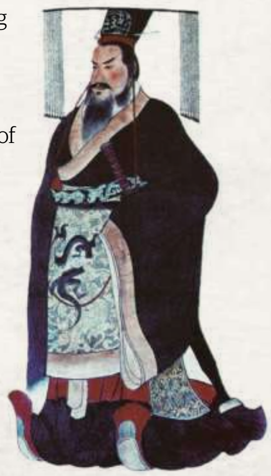
had total control. For example, as one chronicler recorded, "Anyone who failed to report criminal activity would be chopped in two at the waist." The system worked. By 238 BCE, Qin was a rich, self-confident kingdom under the control of a new 22-year-old ruler, King Zheng.

Zheng was fanatical about security. He thought he could make Qin even safer by using his tough, mobile army to extend his control over the other six states. To ensure victory, he turned his nation into a war machine fuelled by good food supplies, ruthless tax-gatherers, military service for almost all men, and highly trained soldiers.

We have no details of his conquests, which started in 230 BCE, but in nine years he defeated all the other six kingdoms. In 221 BCE, he was master of a unified China, which gets its name from his kingdom. This was not China as it is today, just the central and northern bits, but ever since then, the idea of unity has been at the heart of Chinese history. Zheng gave himself a suitably grand title: Qin Shi Huang Di, meaning Qin (or China) First August Emperor. Non-Chinese usually call him the First Emperor.

Now he needed to weld his conquests together with a revolution in government and vast building projects that would control his people and keep enemies out. First, he ordered a revolution in administration, setting up a government of 36 regions, each divided into counties, and each with both civil and military governors, overseeing tax collectors and judges. All the different systems of law, money, weights, measures and even styles of clothing were standardised.

Dissent of any kind was crushed. According to Sima Qian, when a scholar dared criticise the emperor for breaking with tradition, Prime Minister Li Si pointed out that the roots of rebellion lay with scholars and books: "Those who use the past to criticise the present should be put to death!" So the royal archives "were all destroyed. How regrettable!" – burned, said Sima Qian. This episode, known as the Burning of the Books, is generally accepted as true, as is another claiming that "over 460" scholars were buried alive. But Sima Qian, writing during the next dynasty, was keen to discredit his predecessors, and experts question the true meaning of the words widely translated as "burned" and "buried". Anyway, countless Qin books survived. These record cruel punishments, including being torn apart by carriages and being boiled to death. But there are no records of the execution of scholars. It seems the emperor's



Many of the damaged terracotta warriors have been meticulously pieced back together

The level of detail in the terracotta statues' design is astounding

Every terracotta warrior discovered so far has a unique feature

The emperor's greatest achievements

Unification

The First Emperor is referred to as China's First Unifier. There have been many others since, the latest being Mao Zedong, who created Communist China from the ruins of war and revolution in 1949. There have been many periods of division and China has changed shape often. Today's China is 3.4 times the size of Qin, but for 2,000 years, China has looked back to the First Emperor as a symbol of the ultimate ideal: unity.

Standardisation of coins, axles, colours & weights

The Qin Empire was held together by a series of measures that made Qin standards universal. Black was the colour of flags and uniforms. Every state abandoned its own coins for round copper ones with a square hole in the middle. Cartwheels were given a single gauge, so that they all ran in the same ruts. Weights and measures became uniform. Law and order was harsh but equal.

Standardisation of writing

China had had a script for 1,500 years, but it changed with the centuries and each state had its own variant. Under the First Emperor, all regional variations gave way to a single 'seal script'. This was perhaps his most significant reform, because all officials could understand his orders and each other, whatever their dialects. Today, China's script still binds the nation together. Mandarin speakers may not understand spoken Cantonese, but both understand the same written characters.

Roads

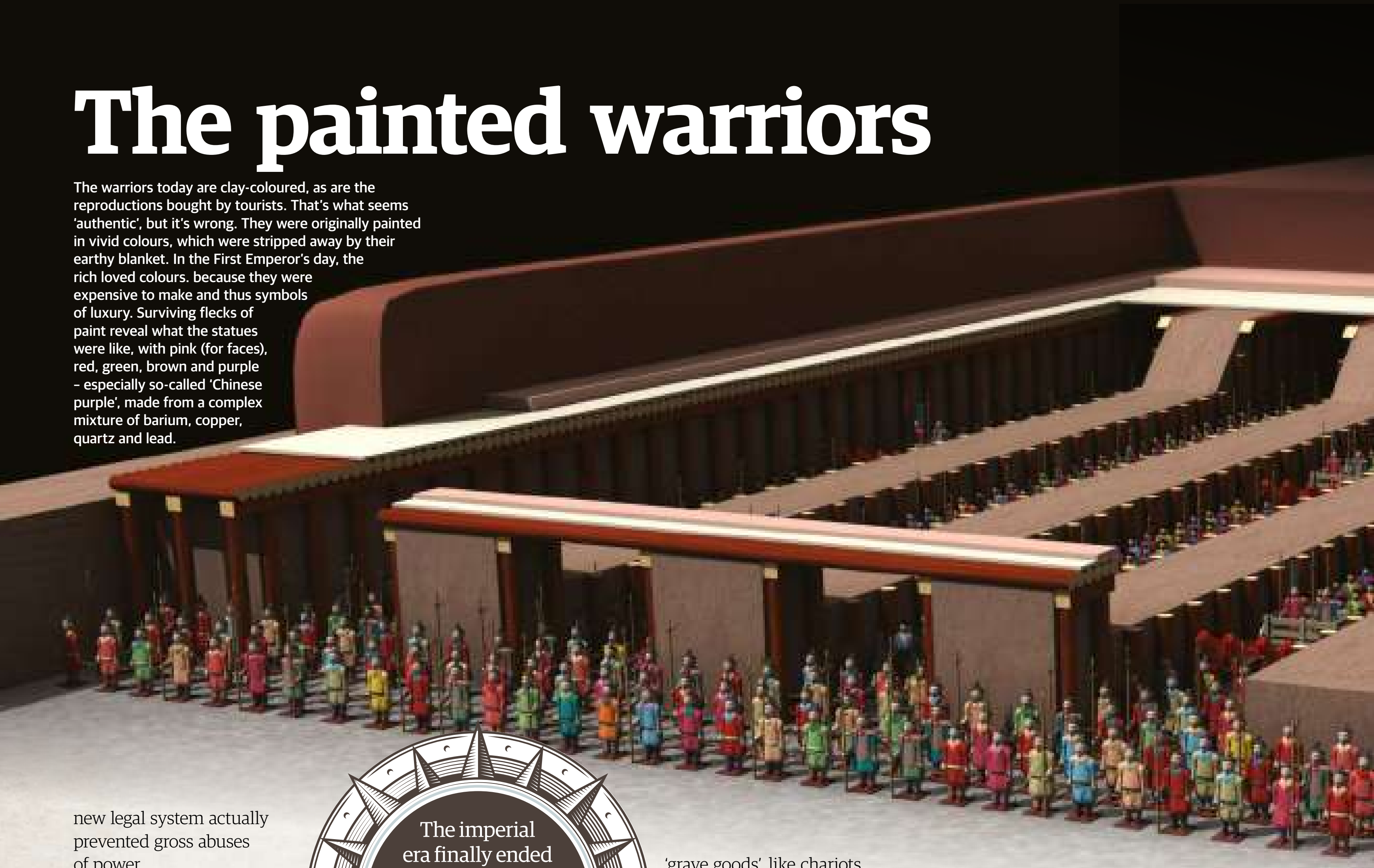
Fast travel was vital for messengers, troops and royal retinues, so the emperor put his labourers to work building roads – almost 7,000km (3,730mi) in all. All the nation's 270 palaces were connected. In part, this was for security. He travelled between them in secret and executed anyone who revealed where he was. One of the roads ran 800 kilometres northward across the Ordos semi-desert so that troops and workers could get to the border – and the Great Wall – as quickly as possible.

Great Wall of China

This was nothing like today's Great Wall, which dates from 1,500 years later. At the time, there were many walls. After unification, there was only one enemy; the nomadic 'barbarians' of the northern grasslands. Fearsome mounted archers, they often galloped south on raids. The emperor's huge workforce joined up many small walls along the northern borders of Zhao and Yan, creating a single barrier stretching across northern China for 2,500 kilometres.

The painted warriors

The warriors today are clay-coloured, as are the reproductions bought by tourists. That's what seems 'authentic', but it's wrong. They were originally painted in vivid colours, which were stripped away by their earthy blanket. In the First Emperor's day, the rich loved colours. because they were expensive to make and thus symbols of luxury. Surviving flecks of paint reveal what the statues were like, with pink (for faces), red, green, brown and purple – especially so-called 'Chinese purple', made from a complex mixture of barium, copper, quartz and lead.



new legal system actually prevented gross abuses of power.

The imperial era finally ended in 1912 when Sun Yat-sen founded the Republic of China after the Xinhai Revolution

Peace had one startling result: the king's vast army – millions of soldiers from all seven nations – was no longer needed. Something had to be done with them, or risk rebellion. So the soldiers were set to work on huge projects: over 6,000 kilometres of paved roads, half a dozen royal palaces, military bases, and – most famously – the first Great Wall.

One the First Emperor's grandest projects was his tomb, built near the ancient capital, Xian, at the foot of a sacred mountain, Mount Li. Records claim that 700,000 worked on it, although 40,000 is a more accurate figure, and they spent a year digging out a pit for the tomb itself. Later, after his death, the tomb would be covered with the hill that is still there today – 50 metres high, 350 metres per side; the size of the Great Pyramid, though made of earth, not stone.

What was it all for? The answer is: to live forever in the spirit world. The emperor, like his whole society, was obsessed with life after death. He believed the next world mirrored this one, and that a dead person needed familiar objects in the grave to recreate life. The rich and powerful needed big tombs, filled with 'grave goods', like chariots, weapons, animals and servants, both real ones, killed and buried with their lord, and models, for a life-like image could in some magical way become 'real' in the spirit world. Everything was designed to remake the emperor's life on Earth – government, banquets, entertainments, hunting, fighting.

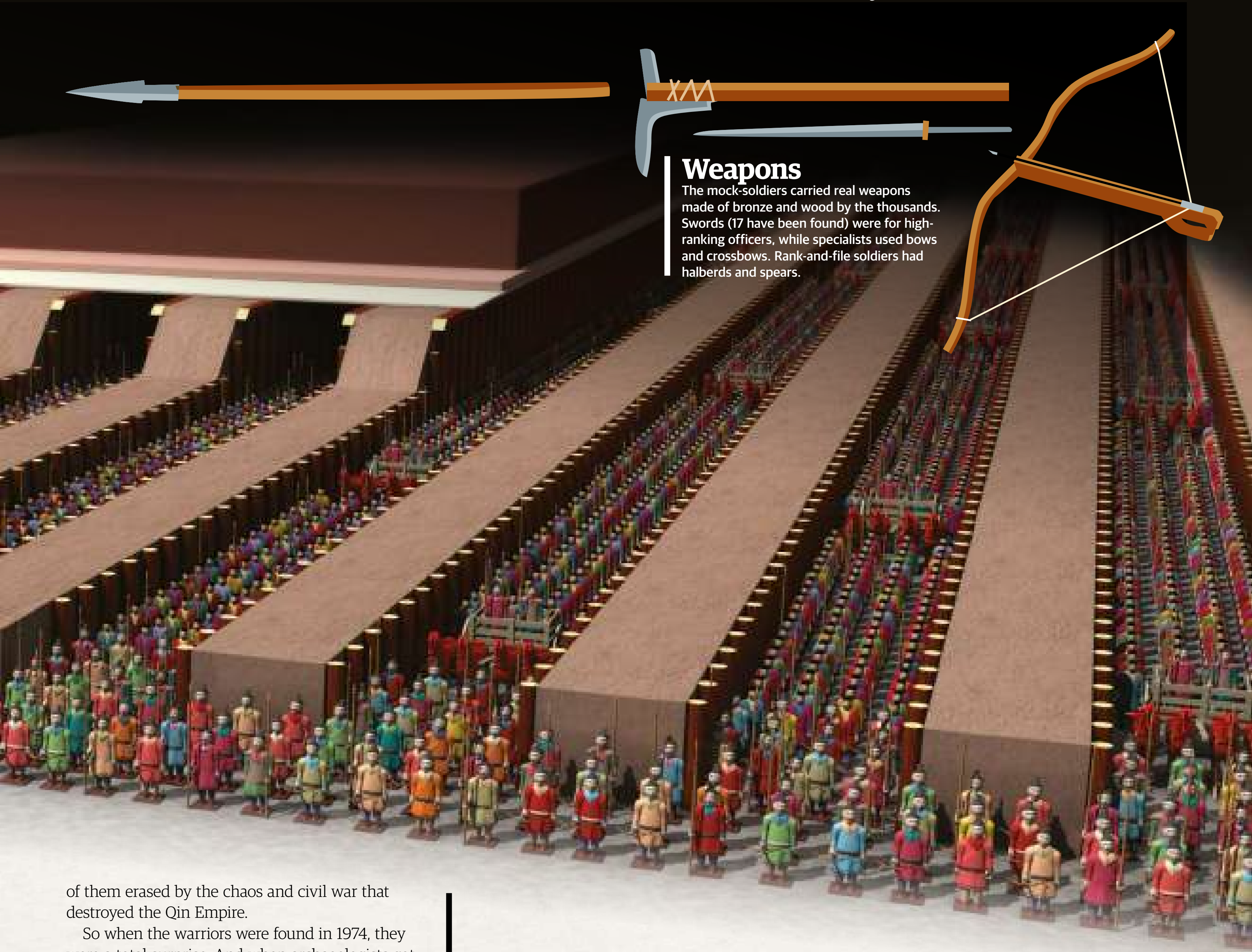
The tomb itself was perhaps devoted to government. Sima Qian says it contains a model of the empire, with the rivers picked out in flowing mercury, the night sky portrayed in the ceiling, and all defended by crossbows ready to fire on intruders. It sounds unlikely, but in 1982 archaeologists probed the tomb with 560 drillings that revealed the outlines of a building and slight traces of mercury vapour. The truth will only be known if and when the tomb is opened.

"The emperor, like his whole society, was obsessed with life after death"

But the emperor would also need an army, and so he commissioned something that was totally original and unique. He had his artisans, hundreds of them, make thousands of full-size warriors out of clay, all painted in vivid colours and carrying real bronze weapons (which was why they had to be full size).

Much of this work must have been done before his death, which was the result of an unspecified cause at the age of 50 in 210 BCE. However, for his burial, tens of thousands of workers rushed to finish the tomb and its many outlying graves. The terracotta warriors were placed in three pits 1.5 kilometres to the east of the tomb. Well-armed with spears, lances, swords and crossbows, they were lined up on a tiled floor as if on a parade ground, ready to help their lord fight off any spirit armies coming to take over his empire. The pits, nine metres deep, were roofed with wooden beams, twice as thick as telegraph poles, weighing 500 kilograms each, over 6,000 in all. The beams were covered with matting, on top of which workers piled three metres of earth.

Then they vanished. There were no records. Sima Qian makes no mention of them. After a generation or two, they were forgotten, the memory



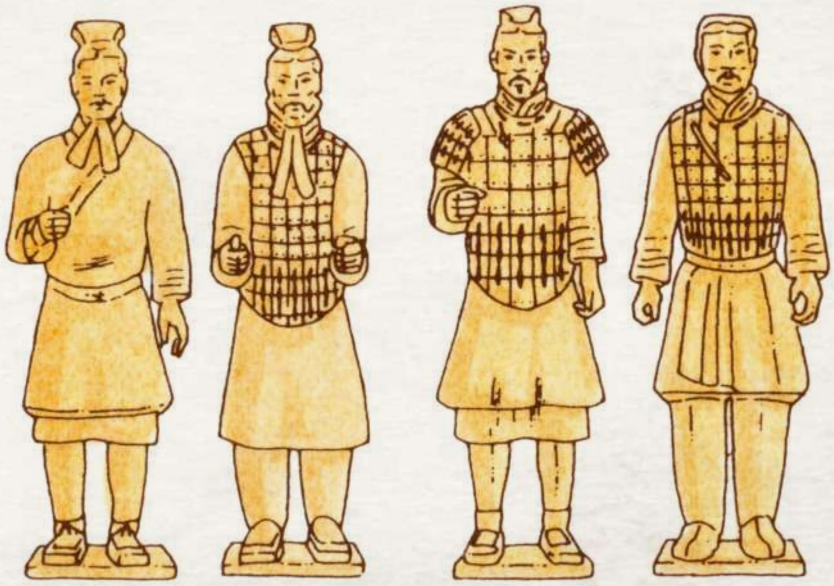
Weapons

The mock-soldiers carried real weapons made of bronze and wood by the thousands. Swords (17 have been found) were for high-ranking officers, while specialists used bows and crossbows. Rank-and-file soldiers had halberds and spears.

of them erased by the chaos and civil war that destroyed the Qin Empire.

So when the warriors were found in 1974, they were a total surprise. And when archaeologists got to work there was another surprise: not a single soldier was found intact. All had been shattered. Today's display is the result of painstaking reconstruction. So far, 1,000 have been restored, though all their bright colours vanished into the earth that buried them. The rest are still buried, awaiting techniques that can ensure better preservation. No one knows exactly how many there are: the 7,000-8,000 is an estimate, as is the number of 670 horses. But this is not enough for an army. The emperor's real army numbered in the tens of thousands. Perhaps there are more to be discovered. After all, there have been many other finds over the years, including horse skeletons, tombs of officials, other types of terracotta statues, bronze birds, and two astonishing half-sized chariots, complete with horses and drivers.

But the star turn is the army, now partly restored from jigsaw puzzles of bits and pieces. Not a single one in the main pit has been found complete. All were shattered - but how? Fire was somehow responsible, for the earth above them was baked



Unique designs

Of the 7,000-8,000 buried and broken figures, about 1,000 have been restored, and each one is different. They are not portraits, but ideals – handsome, well built, serene. The artists just varied the details, like eyebrows, beards and moustaches.

The elixir of life

Some people taught that the body could be made incorruptible by death, and so become a xian, an immortal. For centuries, Daoists experimented with elixirs – mixtures including gold, mercury, arsenic and lead – undeterred by the often fatal results. The First Emperor believed in the elixir, and took seriously a charlatan named Xu Fu, who told him it could be found in islands off the east coast. Xu promised to find it but did nothing. In 210 BCE, the emperor, when touring the east, found and questioned Xu, who claimed he had been prevented from sea travel by a large fish. The emperor, deranged by paranoia, believed him and fired arrows into the sea to kill the non-existent monster. He died soon afterwards.

Many terracotta horses were also made for the emperor's tomb

Restoration of the terracotta warriors is currently in progress

A depiction of what is believed to be buried under the mound - the transparent pyramid in the picture representing the earth on top of it

solid. But how did the fire start, and how could it break every single statue?

To answer, we must become detectives. It must have had something to do with the rebels who rose against the Qin dynasty after the First Emperor's death in 210 BCE, opening eight years of civil war before the Han Dynasty took over in 202 BCE. In a film shown to tourists in the Terracotta Army museum, rebel soldiers break through doors and torch the place. But there were no doors, no mass break-in. There is no evidence of the roof being dug up. So there was no oxygen to sustain a fire. That's the mystery: a fire, but no means to keep it burning.

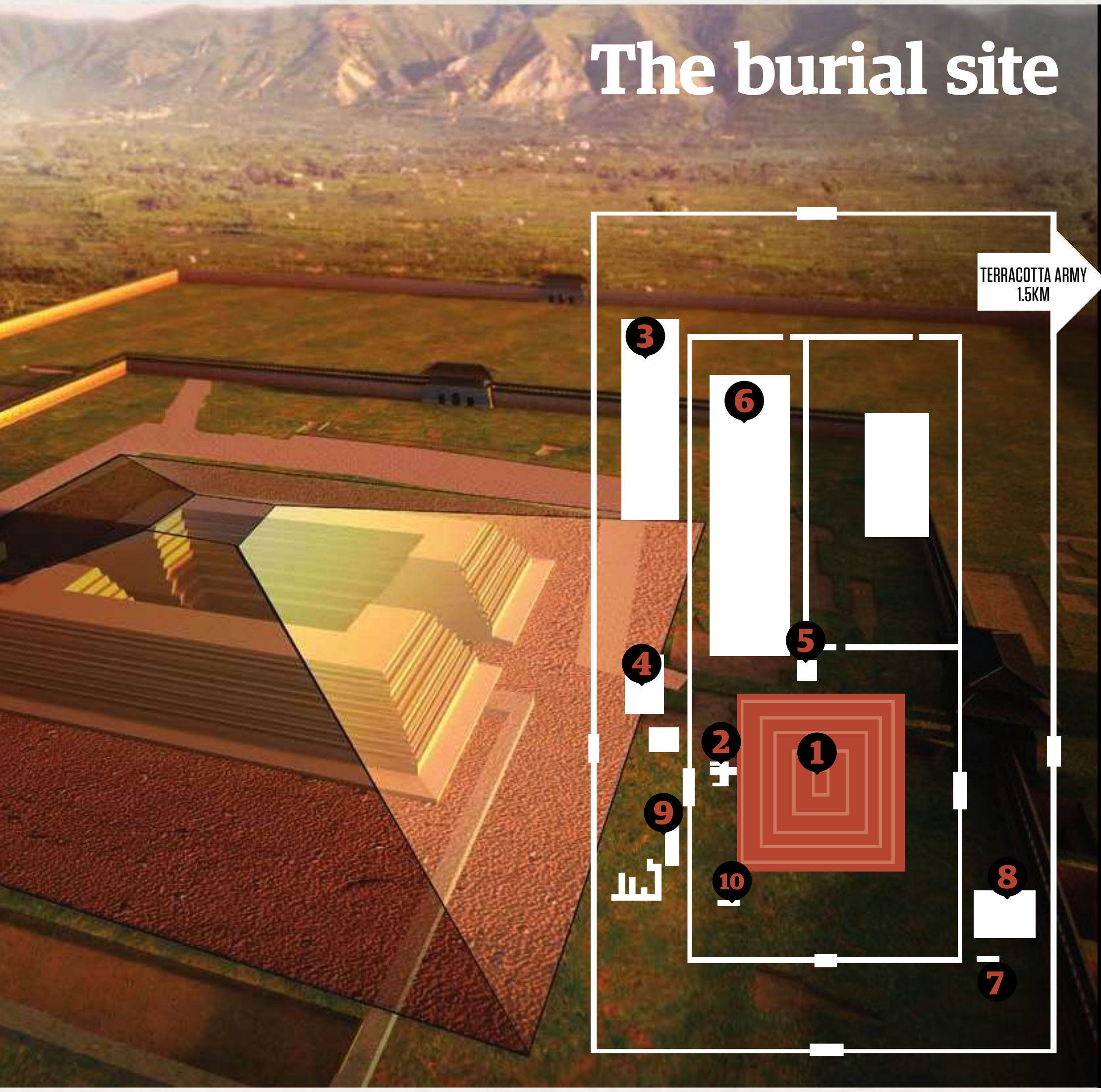
This might have happened: as the empire fell apart, a rebel army approached the tomb, with no army to stop them. Historian Ban Gu, writing 200 years later, says the Qin generals advised: "There are forced labourers at the Mount Li grave complex. Grant them amnesty and supply them with arms." This was done, which temporarily blocked the rebel army, and also stopped work on the First Emperor's tomb. This explains why there are three pits full of soldiers – but a fourth pit is completely empty, awaiting more warriors, which never arrived.

In Lintong, rebels knew about the Terracotta Army from the hastily recruited labourers. So in early 206 BCE, with the Qin palaces ablaze, rebels arrived at the tomb-site, eager for more booty. The vast tomb itself was too much of a challenge. But they knew of the buried army, knew also that it contained real weapons.

There was no time to dig up the earth and beams. The best way in was to dig straight down. The evidence is there. In Pit No 2, a hole like a

After the First Emperor, the Han dynasty came to the throne, ruling on and off from 202 BCE to 220 CE

The burial site



1. The tomb
The burial mound is some 50 to 75 metres high. Soundings suggest that beneath it is a stepped half-pyramid up to 150 metres wide with two entrances. Inside, presumably, is the emperor's coffin.

2. Pit of the Bronze Chariots
Two half-size chariots were found in 1980. One (the so-called High Chariot) was open, the other (the 'Comfortable Chariot') was enclosed, for the emperor's spirit. Both were crushed, but are now restored.

3. Servants' quarters
The worship of the emperor needed a staff of hundreds. Here they lived, with offices and washing facilities.

4. Banqueting Room
It was probably used to provide meals for all the functionaries and to make the food offered every day to the emperor's spirit.

5. Resting Hall
This 57-by-62-metre complex was above ground; the centre for the cult devoted to the emperor.

6. Side Hall
In these above-ground buildings, family members would prepare themselves for the frequent rituals of mourning and worship.

7. Pit of the 'Acrobats'
12 figures, dressed in skirts. 11 of them are perhaps acrobats. One is heavily built, possibly a wrestler.

8. Stone armour pit
Discovered in 1998, this pit contains about 120 suits of limestone armour, all broken. Limestone does not make real armour. It is too heavy and too fragile. It was probably a symbolic defence against evil spirits.

9. Menagerie Pits
Several pits that each contain the skeleton of a bird or animal. They possibly symbolise the First Emperor's hunting ground or zoo.

10. Pit of the Officials
Discovered in 2000, it contained 20 horse skeletons and 12 terracotta figures. Long sleeves and writing gear make clear that they are officials.

small mineshaft bypasses the roof and enters the pit. It's a metre or so wide - big enough for one person at a time to enter, big enough to hand weapons to the surface.

Imagine the first rebel soldier breaking through, seeing nothing, calling for a blazing torch. Its flickering light reveals the front lines of clay soldiers in their original painted finery, with pink faces and brightly coloured coats. In cavernous corridors, the soldiers range backward into darkness and - most importantly - all armed. For fighting men, it's a treasure-trove.

Others slither down the hole, holding more torches. The intruders begin to weave and shove their way through, grabbing weapons, passing them back to the tunnel. "There is no evidence of organised destruction," says the army's senior archaeologist, Yuan Zhongyi. "We found remains of warriors which seem to have fallen in a zig-zag pattern, which suggests they were pushed over as people forced their way through."

Then, in the chaos, something cut the break-in short. Fire. A torch smouldering beside a wooden pillar or one of the wooden chariots. For what happened next, we must rely on modern fire-protection engineers, like Joe Lally, an archaeologist with the US Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In his computerised scenario, there was no exit for the smoke. The corridors filled with smoke in about four minutes, forcing the thieves to crawl to the exit, toppling more warriors and horses. They have only a few precious minutes to escape, and there is only room for one at a time up the exit shaft. They all made it because no charred skeletons were found with the smashed soldiers.

> "Then, in the chaos, something cut the break-in short"

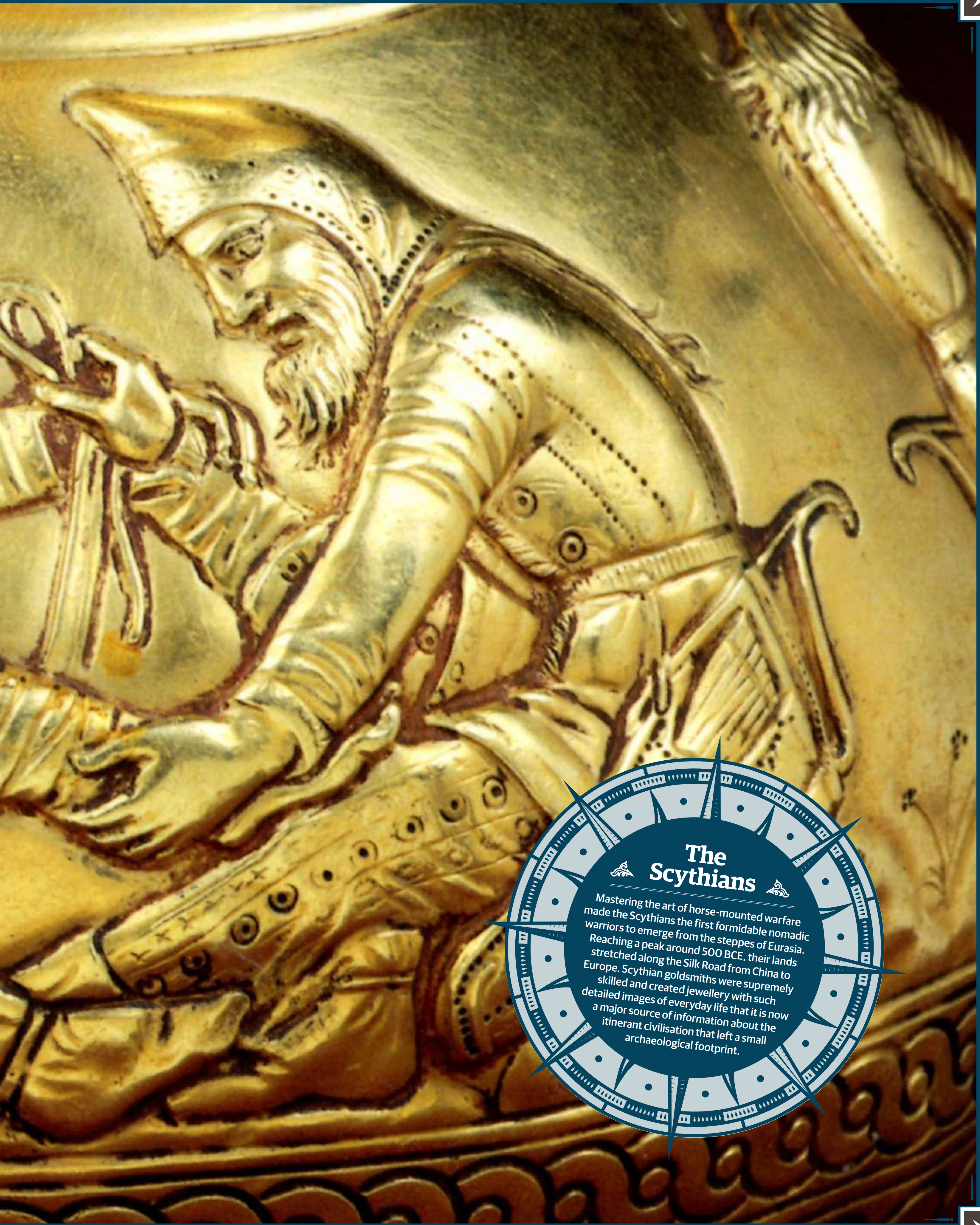
There is something odd about this fire. It takes a powerful hold, but it needs a flow of oxygen to keep it going. There's not enough coming in through the small entrance, so the flames go out.

Yet we know that fire destroyed the pit. How? This was a special sort of fire, like those that spread underground along seams of coal. Coal-seam fires are started by bush fires or lightning and there are thousands of them around the world, burning very slowly, for a very long time. There's one under the town of Centralia, Pennsylvania, that has been smouldering for half a century, and it may go on doing so for another 250 or so years.

Imagine the scene: in the main pit, the flames are dead, the pit dark again, smoke drifting along the corridors. But the fire has found a home in the ceiling, where the earth keeps a lid on it. Traces of oxygen seep in, just enough to keep the ceiling smouldering. Slowly, the slow fire eats away at the beams. At some point, charred timbers fall, breaking a piece off a warrior or two. A section of earth follows.

And so it goes, for years, the warriors, chariots and crossbow-men crushed by the falling beams, the surface subsiding bit by bit, filled again by water-borne mud, until not a trace remains of what lies beneath, until the five Yang brothers find an earth-god while digging a well.

© Thinkstock; Adrian Mann; John Man/Terracotta Army Museum



The Scythians

Mastering the art of horse-mounted warfare made the Scythians the first formidable nomadic warriors to emerge from the steppes of Eurasia. Reaching a peak around 500 BCE, their lands stretched along the Silk Road from China to Europe. Scythian goldsmiths were supremely skilled and created jewellery with such detailed images of everyday life that it is now a major source of information about the itinerant civilisation that left a small archaeological footprint.

© Alamy

THE GOLDEN AGES OF PERSIA

In the ancient world, pre-Islamic Persia was a beacon of political centrism and cultural diversity

Written by April Madden

One night in 600 BCE, Astyages, king of Media, had a terrible dream. He dreamt that his daughter, Mandane, gave birth to a vine that overgrew his house. It spread all over Media; it surged into neighbouring Lydia, the ancestral home of his queen, Aryenis, until it had run rampant over all of the kingdoms of the land that is today called Iran. It was an omen, Astyages’ soothsayers told him. Mandane would bear a child who would supplant their grandfather.

Astyages was perplexed. He had married Mandane off to one of his vassals. Cambyses, first of his name, was the ruler of a small Elamite city-state called Anshan. It had once been an important place, wealthy and cultured, a prize that the old empires had fought over. But that was long ago. Whatever sons Mandane bore to the upstart little monarchy that now ruled it, the scions of these backwater client-kings could never rise to challenge mighty Astyages. Still, better safe than sorry. He sent one of his generals, Harpagus, to Anshan to bring his pregnant daughter home.

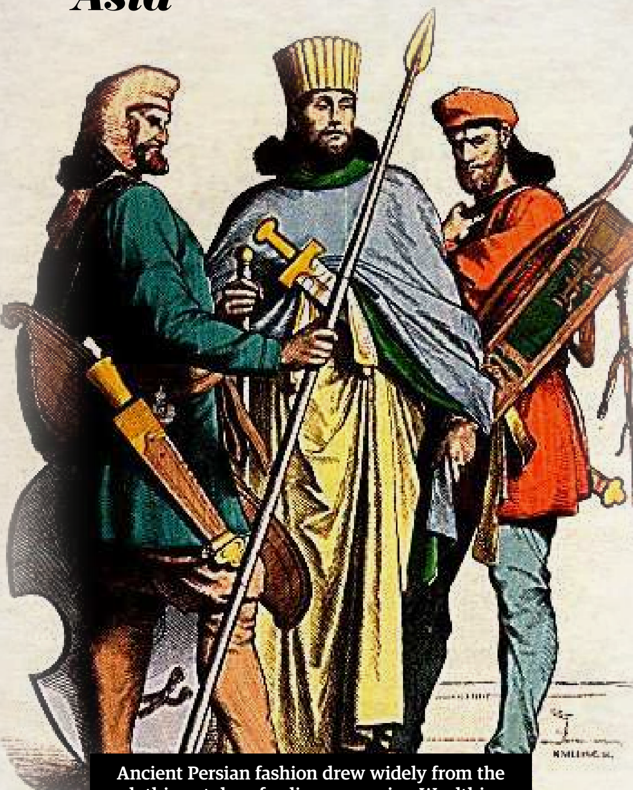
What happened next sounds like a fairytale, and perhaps it is, because the Greek historian Herodotus related it. When Mandane’s son was born, Harpagus found a shepherd with a stillborn son, swapped them over and presented Astyages with the body. Mandane returned to Anshan; the shepherd, Mitridates, raised her baby. The deception went according to plan until the young Cyrus was in his teens, at which point the apparently genetic kingliness of his nature asserted itself and brought him to the attention of Astyages again. The shepherd confessed, the boy was packed off home where he immediately assumed his battle-weary father’s throne and Harpagus’ own son was killed and served up to him on a plate in retribution. Herodotus was never one to let the facts get in the way of a good yarn, and his version of events, with all the conventions of Greek myth, owes more to legend than it does to fact. Nevertheless, the people in the tale are real enough, particularly Cyrus II, better known to posterity as Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire.

Cyrus’ empire, however, began almost by accident. He took some territories by fighting invasive forces back to the cities they’d come from; he inherited others. By the time Cyrus had developed a taste for conquest, he had taken Sumer, Akkad and Babylonia; he swept through Asia Minor. He was proclaimed the king of the four corners of the world. But, unlike other empire builders, Cyrus didn’t demand homogenous unity from his conquests - vassal states retained their own cultures and cultural practices. When Cyrus took the ancient, fabled city of Babylon, he ensured religious freedoms for all of its culturally diverse peoples, meaning that the Jewish exiles there could practice their faith openly once more.

Cyrus’ fledgling Achaemenid Empire was characterised by its embrace of diversity, and this was a social constant throughout the years that followed. People in its assorted city-states adopted styles of jewellery, clothing and other fashions from different parts of the empire; textiles and pottery embraced new designs from far-flung places. Key to this was the way that the empire was structured, maximising both peace and profit. Each region was governed by a local overlord called a satrap who combined local administration with imperial policy. All free subjects were

Persepolis, the ancient Persian capital, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979

Today Persepolis lies in ruins, but it was once the capital of one of the world's greatest empires



Ancient Persian fashion drew widely from the clothing styles of a diverse empire. Wealthier classes favoured flowing robes while active people like soldiers preferred practical trousers

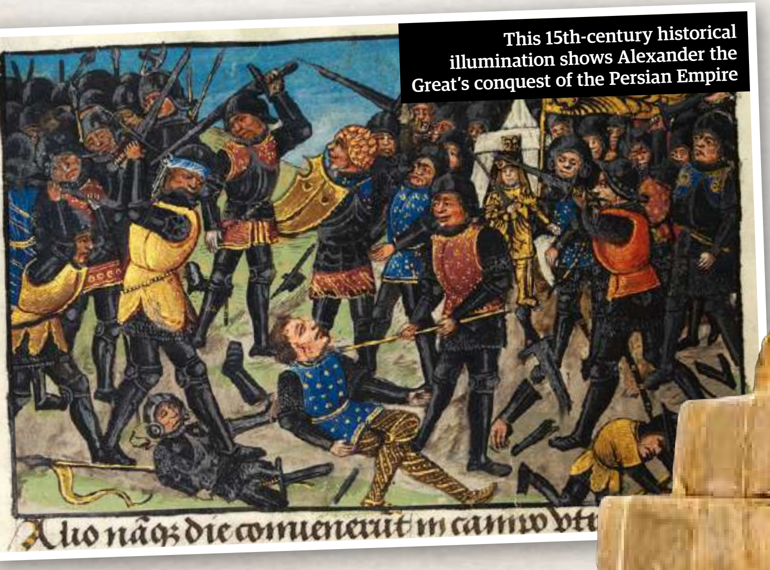
Achaemenid Persia was famous for its artisans, who produced work like these stunning gold drinking vessels, now in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art

considered equal under the law no matter what ethnic group they came from, and though there was a state religion, local faiths, customs, laws and trade agreements were left in place. Women worked and held supervisory positions in many professions and trades, a convention in some parts of the empire that was adopted by others. Meanwhile, the empire kept the peace, collected taxes and undertook public works through its satrapy network, administered from the new capital of Pasargadae that Cyrus had founded. It ruled over a cultural melting pot, a sprawling, well-managed and wealthy empire that at its height claimed dominion over 44 per cent of the world's population – the largest relative rulership of a population of any empire in history.

It wasn't to last. When Cyrus' tyrannical, tax-hungry son Cambyses II conducted ill-advised forays into Egypt, the state priesthood inserted a usurper into his place, claiming he was Cambyses' brother. The dissatisfied population didn't care that their new king was a puppet for the Zoroastrian theocracy; they embraced him – for about seven months, until another true Achaemenid took the throne. Under Darius the Great, the Persian Empire blossomed like never before. Where Cyrus had laid foundations, he built walls. He organised the provinces and the satrapy, he introduced uniform coinage and standardised weights and measures throughout the empire, he made Aramaic its official language, he constructed roads. The empire that had always embraced diversity now found it even quicker and easier to trade goods, money and ideas. He founded its great ceremonial capital, Persepolis, a city of 100 pillars and 40 minarets, although much of the real governance of the empire actually happened in ancient, well-established local capitals like Babylon, Ecbatana and Susa. But Darius also made poor decisions. After spectacular defeats by Greece at the Battles of Marathon in 490 BCE and Thermopylae in 480 BCE, Persia was left on something of a back footing in the new Hellenic world order.

The first Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great, is also known as the Achaemenid Empire

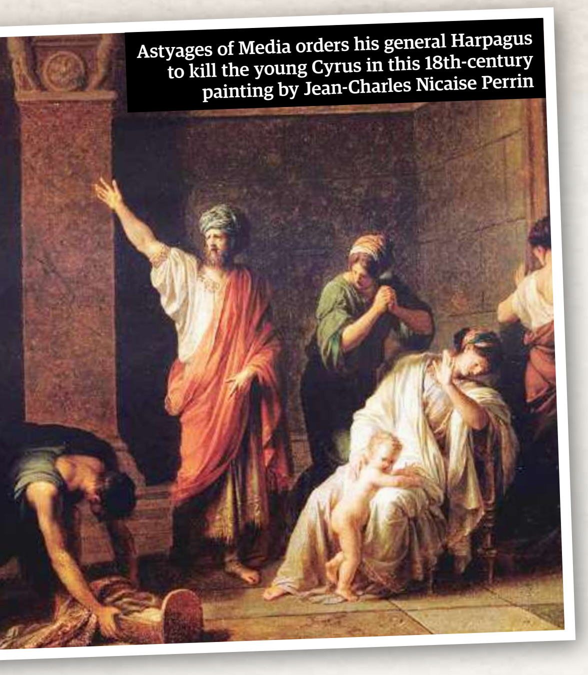
By the 45-year reign of Artaxerxes II, the Achaemenid Empire's longest-serving ruler, Persia was reasserting its primacy. Artaxerxes restored many of the earlier empire's now fading architectural glories, and he presided over a new age in its state religion. The Zoroastrians, once persecuted for the part they played in the unsuccessful coup against Cambyses II, now found their way back into the centre of political power, largely thanks to an innovation adopted from Babylon that saw the king's treasury receive a percentage of all 'temple taxes' – a compulsory fee of ten per cent of their total income that all citizens had to pay to their nearest Zoroastrian temple. In an empire replete with artisans – predominantly metalworkers, weavers, potters and stonemasons – who made beautiful, expensive things from its rich resources this was lucrative indeed, but the fee was even payable by subsistence farmers who grew the grains, fruit and vegetables that fed the majority of the empire, although the old-fashioned nomadic tribes who raised cattle, goats and sheep often moved too quickly to be subject to it. And when Artaxerxes III took Egypt in 343



This 15th-century historical illumination shows Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian Empire

Alio nãq3 die conuenerũt in campo

The tomb of Cyrus the Great. Alexander the Great paid his respects to the founder of the Achaemenid Empire when he conquered Persia



Astyages of Media orders his general Harpagus to kill the young Cyrus in this 18th-century painting by Jean-Charles Nicaise Perrin

BCE, the incalculably valuable resources, money and learning of one of the ancient world's most advanced nations enriched Persia's all-embracing melting pot still further.

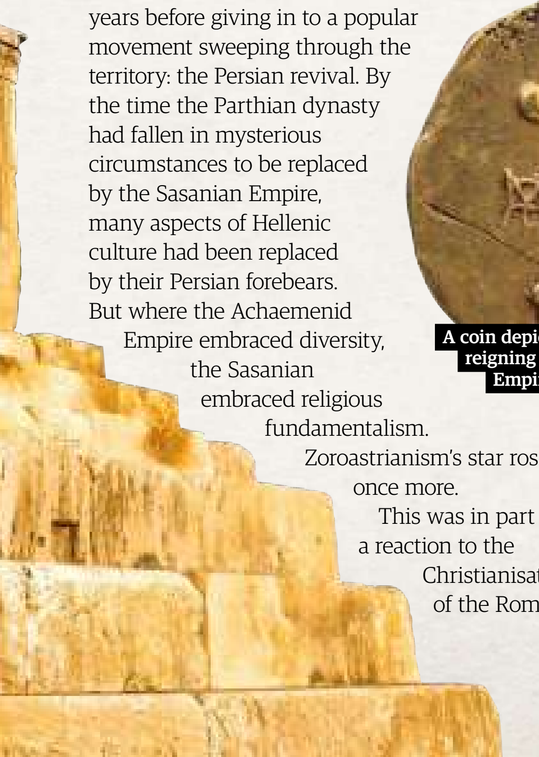
But the old enemy, Greece, hadn't forgotten Persia, and once it had united under the banner of Alexander III of Macedon (Alexander the Great), it toppled the Achaemenid Empire once and for all. Alexander paid his respects at Cyrus the Great's tomb and was disturbed to find it looted by thieves. He questioned the Zoroastrian priesthood, ostensibly about what he viewed as the blasphemous desecration of the tomb (Cyrus was a hero of his) but he was in fact suspicious of their influence on his new conquest's politics and society. Alexander went on to adopt much of the Achaemenid Empire's approach to civil service and multiculturalism to manage his own vast conquests, but upon his early death Persia became just another broken remnant of the once-unified Alexandrian Empire that had been inspired by it.

Under the rule of the ethnically, culturally Grecian Seleucid Empire, it was just another little bit of Macedonian Hellas cast adrift, until the Persians seized back control in 247 BCE. The newly arisen Parthian Empire maintained Greek customs at court for perhaps 50 years before giving in to a popular movement sweeping through the territory: the Persian revival. By the time the Parthian dynasty had fallen in mysterious circumstances to be replaced by the Sasanian Empire, many aspects of Hellenic culture had been replaced by their Persian forebears. But where the Achaemenid Empire embraced diversity, the Sasanian embraced religious fundamentalism.

Zoroastrianism's star rose once more. This was in part a reaction to the Christianisation of the Roman territories nearby, a political decision that had very little to do with whatever faith the multicultural Persian citizenry practiced behind closed doors.

Secular Persia was still tolerant of a variety of religions, particularly Judaism, but under the new, codified structures of state-sponsored Zoroastrianism, heresy, apostasy and the practice of Christianity were harshly punished crimes. In actual fact, the Zoroastrian priesthood was worried about the wrong faith: their theocratic grasp on the empire was eventually toppled in the 7th century by Islam, the new religion of the Arab skirmishers who had been harrying the Sasanian borders.

The conquerors adopted the Babylonian concept of the temple tax, now renamed 'jizya', and used it to extort their formerly diverse subjects into adopting the culturally homogenous society of the caliphate states. The glory days of multicultural Persia were no more.



A coin depicting Artaxerxes II, the longest-reigning monarch of the Achaemenid Empire, who ruled for 45 years

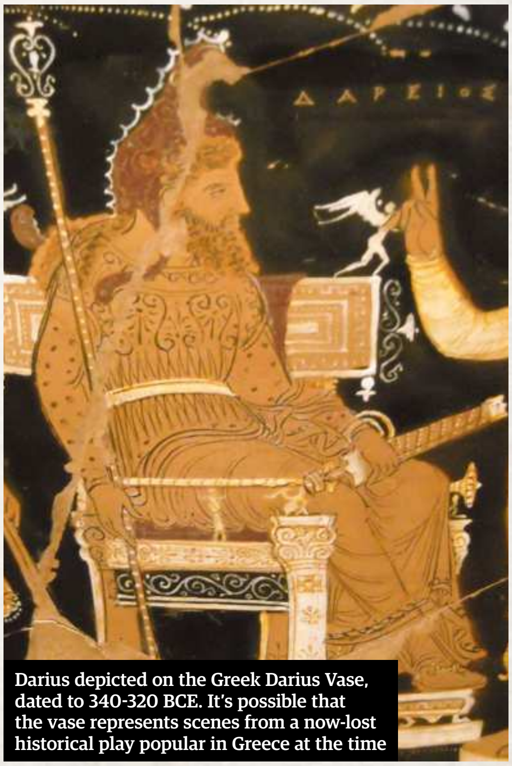
Following a wise god

Zoroastrianism is an ancient religion that pits itself against evil and chaos

One of the oldest practiced religions in the world, Zoroastrianism is a faith that is still followed today. Based on the ancient teachings of the prophet Zoroaster, it's a monotheistic faith that worships Ahura Mazda, or 'wise lord'. The god was initially invoked and worshipped alone; during the reign of Artaxerxes II, he began to be invoked as part of a trinity with Mithra, a god of truth, justice and oath keeping, and Anahita, a fertility goddess of water and wisdom. The religion's teachings concentrate on the eternal struggle between good and evil, in which the latter will eventually be vanquished. Many of its philosophical and cosmological ideas have influenced other world religions, notably the concept of a holy trinity, judgement in the afterlife, and the idea of heaven and hell.

In contemporary practice, Zoroastrianism is an open-minded and sometimes syncretic religion that's focused on the act of doing good. It has adopted localised influences from the territories it found itself in during the golden ages of the Persian Empire, which saw it travel as far as parts of India. Suppressed during the Arab conquest of Persia, it was Zoroastrianism's continual practice in outlying territories that kept its flame alive: an important idea in the faith, which treats fire and water as elements of ritual purification. In the ancient world, practitioners of Zoroastrianism were called 'magi', from which our word 'magic' derives.

The Zoroastrian fire temple in Yazd, Iran. It's thought that there are between 124,000 and 190,000 Zoroastrians practicing worldwide today



Darius depicted on the Greek Darius Vase, dated to 340-320 BCE. It's possible that the vase represents scenes from a now-lost historical play popular in Greece at the time

© Getty Images, Creative Commons; Carlo Raso, Marie-Lan Nguyen, Makthorpe

The Nabateans

Although the world knows this magnificent monument in the stunning ancient city of Petra as the Treasury, it was actually a mausoleum for Aretas IV, king of the Nabateans. He ruled a kingdom in the northwest Arabian Peninsula that, for four centuries before its eventual assimilation into the Roman Empire, grew tremendously wealthy through its control of a web of trade routes.

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THE THREE KINGDOMS OF KOREA

As China crumbled into a series of petty kingdoms, three powers emerged across the Korean Peninsula, ready to overthrow the imperial yoke and seize power for themselves

• Written by Hareth Al Bustani •

In 108 BCE, the Chinese Han dynasty wiped out the Gojoseon kingdom, the first Korean state, based in the north of the peninsula. However, strong local resistance soon forced the Chinese to withdraw from three of their four commanderies. The fourth, in the far northwest, with its capital at Pyongyang, was a powerful outpost, facilitating the spread of Chinese culture into the peninsula. In 313 CE, it was captured by an upstart kingdom, called the Goguryeo - one of three Korean powers to thrive in the vacuum left behind by the Gojoseon, alongside the Baekje in the southwest, and the Silla in the southeast. Having overturned the old order, in the ensuing centuries the three would wage war on each other until one emerged supreme.

The kingdoms of Korea were in constant rivalry with each other, with many alliances being forged and broken

According to the 11th-century history of Korea, the Goguryeo was founded by a prince of the former Manchurian kingdom of Buyeo in 37 BCE. Bringing together five tribes in the middle reaches of the Yalu River in southern Manchuria, the Goguryeo fast grew into the Korean Peninsula's pre-eminent cultural and political power. One by one, it conquered its neighbours; from the polities of Ye and Okjeo to the Han Chinese prefecture of Xientu, all the way south to the central peninsula.

Meanwhile, in 18 BCE, another supposed Buyeo prince led a group of settlers to the southwest of the Korean Peninsula, creating the Baekje dynasty, centred around the fertile Han River near modern-day Seoul. Just one of 50 such polities in the confederacy of Mahan, the Baekje conquered and annexed their neighbours, before attacking and destroying the Chinese commandery of Daifang.

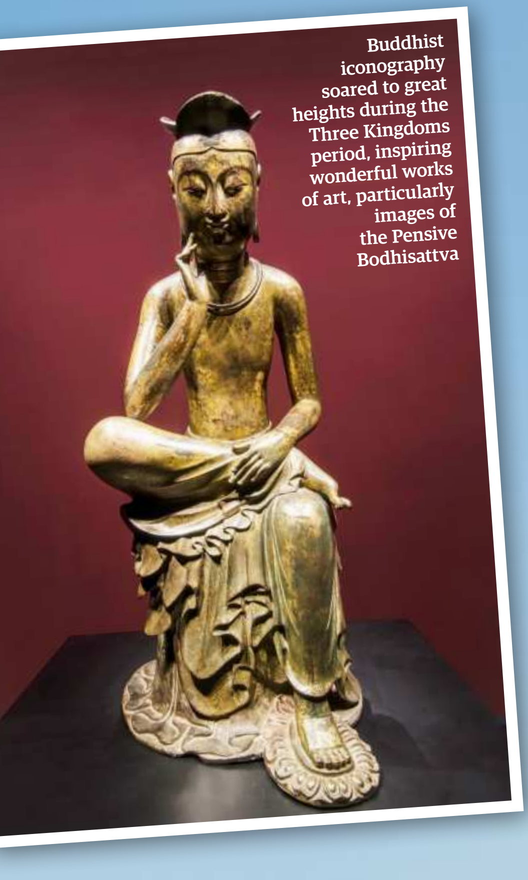
To the east, the Silla emerged from a small walled town in the modern coastal North Gyeongsang Province in 57 BCE. Uniting 12 chiefdoms from across the southeast, the Silla then went on to absorb their weaker neighbours. When the Gojoseon kingdom fell, an exodus of refugees flooded into Silla, bringing its iron culture and boosting the state's growth.

Of the three, the Goguryeo were the most aggressive. When the Sui dynasty came to power in China, the Goguryeo offered their allegiance to the Central Asian Turks, a perennial thorn in the Sui's side. The Sui amassed an army of 300,000 men, launching four successive campaigns, only to be utterly defeated every time - ushering in their own demise.

From its capital in Pyongyang, the Goguryeo kingdom acted as a conduit for Chinese culture, learning from the region's established military and cultural powerhouse. Eager to elevate their education and cultural institutions, the Goguryeo established the first National Confucian Academy in 372 CE. Though a shamanistic society, when the Buddhist monk Sundo arrived that same year, the king was suitably impressed, making it the official state religion. Through these twin schools, the rulership sought to spread shared customs across its growing territory, and unify its various sources of power. While the Baekje adopted Buddhism just over a decade later, the Silla would not do so until the 6th century. In each society, Buddhism would have a profoundly modernising effect, encouraging and facilitating the advancement of education, art and culture.

The Baekje enjoyed trade with the Chinese Wu dynasty, specifically requesting copies of the Chinese classics, while simultaneously initiating a cultural exchange with their allies, the Japanese kingdom of Yamato. They shipped over artists, musicians, physicians, scholars, monks, artisans

“When the Gojoseon kingdom fell, an exodus of refugees flooded into Silla, boosting the state’s growth”



Buddhist iconography soared to great heights during the Three Kingdoms period, inspiring wonderful works of art, particularly images of the Pensive Bodhisattva

Trading with the Chinese Wu dynasty gave the Baekje access to Chinese literature, scholars, artisans and monks, fuelling rapid cultural development

and architects, playing a crucial role in the spread of continental culture. While this East Asian trade route transformed the Baekje into one of the pre-eminent Korean kingdoms, with tentacles as far as Shandong across the Yellow Sea in China, the nature of the state – with a foreign ruling class dominating the local masses – proved tenuous. After the Goguryeo finished subduing the northern nomadic tribes, they attacked the Baekje, forcing them to move their capital city southwards twice, landing at Sabi, or modern Buyeo, where the kingdom began to truly thrive.

Meanwhile, the conservative Silla had a much slower start than its neighbours – at times, even weaker than the confederacy of Gaya, nestled between them and the Baekje. However, in the absence of haste, they built their kingdom on a solid foundation. Silla was centred around an indigenous semi-democratic institution, the council of hwabaek – a court of aristocrats descended from six communal chiefs, headed by a sacred leader. The hwabaek allowed the Silla to table national issues for debate and reach a compromise all leaders agreed on – a process augmented by the hwarang education system, which trained young aristocrats to become the leaders and generals of tomorrow.

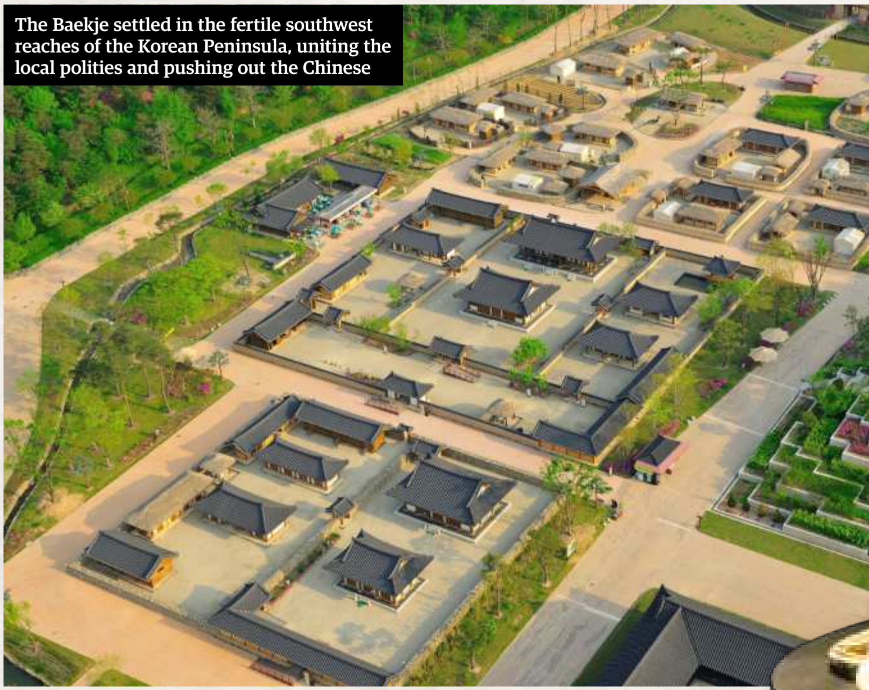
While there were three kingdoms, there was also a small confederation called Gaya in the south of the peninsula

In the ensuing two centuries, the spirit of hwarangdo instilled the Silla with a strict warrior code, whereby death in battle was preferable to the shame of retreat. One story tells of a general who, on the verge of losing his fortress, made a desperate suicidal charge towards the Baekje, only to hit a pagoda tree and die.

The kolp'um, or 'bone-rank', system, meanwhile, divided the ruling class into five strata, followed by commoners. Each specific caste had its own hereditary socio-economic role to play in the service of the state and community. This pre-determination governed every aspect of daily life, down to the use of utensils. Such social rigidity neutered the forces of ambition and factionalism, proving a powerful tool for incorporating new chiefdoms, while maintaining national unity.

By the 6th century, the Silla had already begun building warships, and boosting agricultural output with the development of ox ploughs. However, the advent of Buddhism, which had long taken root among their peasant populace, heralded

The spread of Buddhism was accompanied by a spate of great works, such as the Baekje's remarkable wooden pagoda at Mireuksa Temple



The Baekje settled in the fertile southwest reaches of the Korean Peninsula, uniting the local polities and pushing out the Chinese

This gilt-bronze incense burner is a remarkable example of Baekje craftsmanship, boasting many layers of Buddhist and Taoist symbolism

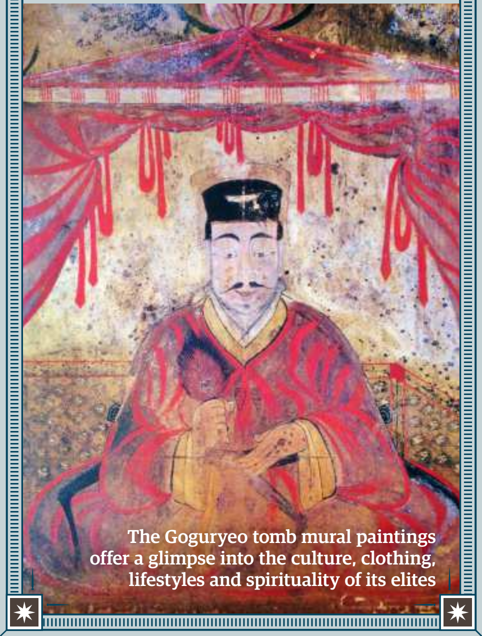
The Goguryeo tombs

While all three kingdoms had curious burial practices, Goguryeo royals and nobles began their journeys into the afterlife in the most spectacular fashion of all

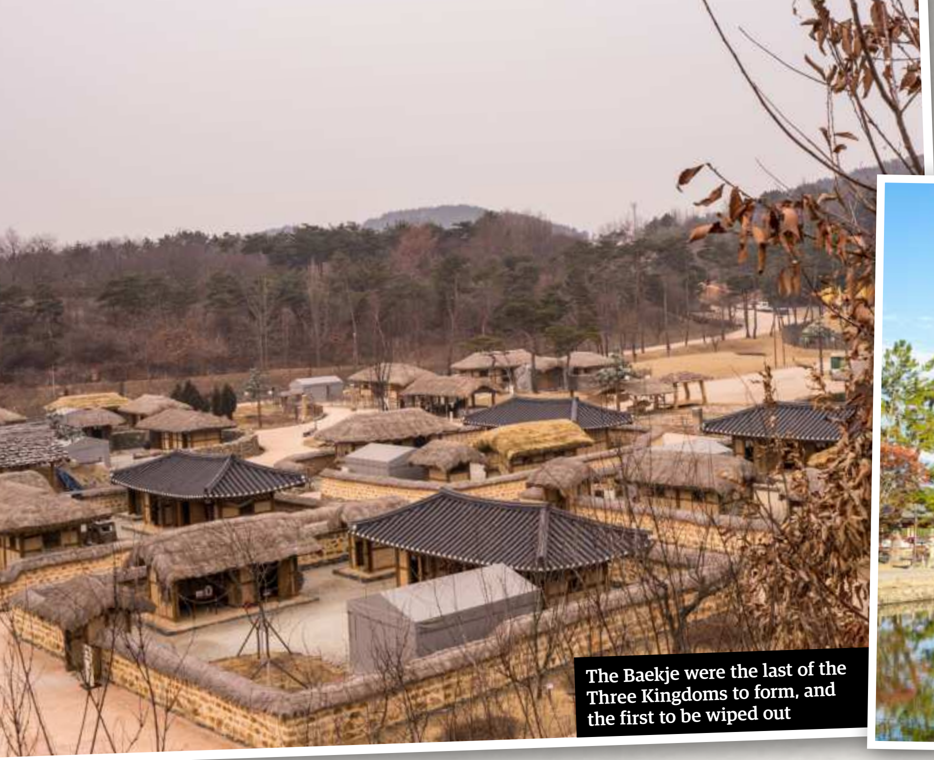
Though some 10,000 Goguryeo tombs have been discovered across North Korea and China, 100 stand out from the crowd. Adorned with intricate murals, they are not only some of the few extant samples of Goguryeo tangible heritage, but among the most fascinating from across the Three Kingdoms.

While most Goguryeo burial chambers were built of stone and covered with soil, they ranged from single chambers to elaborate multi-chambered tombs, utilising advanced engineering to support heavy ceilings. One, for example, features an entrance room, an antechamber with two side chambers and then a main chamber at the rear, all connected by corridors – a veritable underground palace, designed for a dead couple.

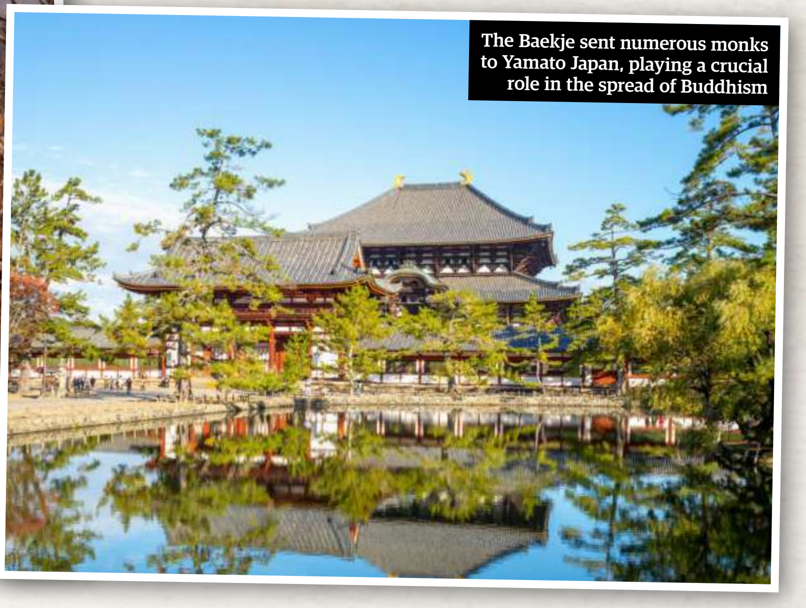
Inside such tombs, walls were adorned with remarkable murals, depicting the deceased, their loved ones, their accomplishments, their nature, their clothing, their food, their passions and their fates. Moments from their lives were captured, with colourful snapshots of hunting expeditions, wrestling bouts, battles, their staff and their homes. Inside the main chamber, each wall was adorned with one of the four Goguryeo deities – the Azure Dragon of the East, the White Tiger of the West, the Vermillion Phoenix of the South, and the Tortoise and Snake of the North. Ceilings would be decorated with celestial and natural imagery, complete with flying fish, birds, three-legged crows, toads and anthropomorphic cows.



The Goguryeo tomb mural paintings offer a glimpse into the culture, clothing, lifestyles and spirituality of its elites



The Baekje were the last of the Three Kingdoms to form, and the first to be wiped out



The Baekje sent numerous monks to Yamato Japan, playing a crucial role in the spread of Buddhism

a time of great reform as the Silla cast off old 'barbaric' traditions, such as burying children alive alongside dead kings. The grand chieftain changed his title to the Chinese ideogram 'wang', or 'king', and formally named his kingdom Silla – a Chinese proverb meaning 'the newer the virtue, the broader the rule'.

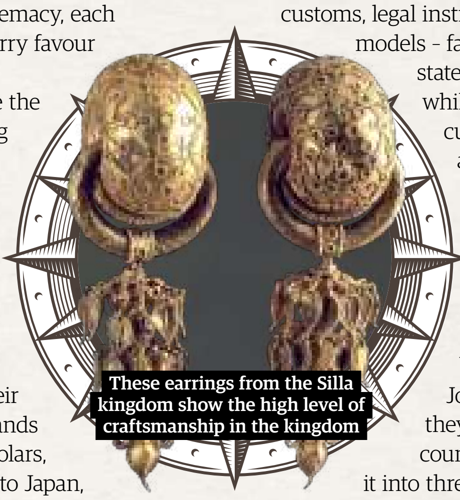
They also began making paper and developed an intricate knowledge of astronomy, building Cheomseongdae, the world's oldest surviving observatory. Around this time, the Three Kingdoms adopted Chinese metallurgy and ceramics methods. The Baekje produced high-quality steel weapons and tools with heating and water-quenching, utilising an advanced bellows system, and replacing casting with forging. Meanwhile, the quality of Silla ornamental craftsmanship earned it the moniker 'the Country of Gold'. One bronze bowl, created in celebration of the Goguryeo king, Gwanggaeto the Great, was discovered in a Silla tomb 100 years after its production, highlighting the flow of culture and goods between the rival powers. The former low-fired, plain and coarse style of pottery was also replaced by dojil stoneware, high-fired, wheel-thrown and greyish-blue.

While the Goguryeo loved song and dance, the Baekje were fond of archery and letter-writing. All three kingdoms celebrated their new faith by commissioning grand buildings and artworks, infusing Chinese inspiration with indigenous flair; from the towering pagodas of Mireuksa Temple to Pensive Bodhisattva, a remarkable gilt-bronze statue almost one metre in height.

Though the Silla had previously been a vassal under the protection of the Goguryeo, when a succession crisis hit their northern overlords, they struck while the iron was hot, declaring independence. In 532, they teamed up with the Baekje to subjugate the Gaya, and just two decades later would betray their erstwhile ally, seizing the Han River Valley in the heart of the peninsula. The Baekje king was so infuriated that he launched a frenzied attack – only to be cut down and defeated. With the Gaya out of the picture, the remaining three kingdoms locked horns in an existentialist war for supremacy, each desperately attempting to curry favour with China.

Of the three, the Silla were the most adept diplomats, allying with the resurgent Tang dynasty in 648. Having defeated the Western Turks in 657, the Tang threw their weight behind the Silla – simultaneously attacking the troublesome Goguryeo, and helping to overcome the Baekje and their Yamato allies in 660. Thousands of Baekje nobles, priests, scholars, craftsmen and refugees fled to Japan, rather than live beneath the Silla yoke. Eight years later, after some back and forth, the Silla and Tang surrounded Pyongyang, killing scores of generals and capturing the king. After 70 years of constant war, the Goguryeo were finally spent, with 8,000 survivors fleeing to Mount Dongmo, to form the Manchurian-Korean state of Parhae, ruled over by former Goguryeo aristocrats.

When it became apparent the Tang had merely used the Silla to pave the way for their own conquest of the peninsula, the two powers turned on each other. A unanimous Silla victory in 676 finally handed them control of the southern two-thirds of the peninsula. For more than three centuries, the Silla ruled in peace and prosperity, continuing to adopt Chinese customs, legal institutions and administrative models – fashioning a Chinese-style state with the help of the Tang, while protecting their indigenous culture. Silla monks, scholars and merchants travelled to China and India, making their mark on the world and learning from it. However, in the 10th century, intellectuals began to grow resentful of the hereditary bias of the bone-rank system. Joining with regional magnates, they rebelled, throwing the country into civil war, and tearing it into three once again: Later Silla, Later Goguryeo and Later Baekje. Through a combination of deft military ability and diplomatic clout, a Later Goguryeo magnate-general emerged supreme, creating the Goryeo dynasty, from which modern Korea takes its name.



These earrings from the Silla kingdom show the high level of craftsmanship in the kingdom

Donggung Palace was built by Munmu, the first king of Unified Silla, in 674 CE, complete with artificial pond

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The Seleucid Empire

When Alexander the Great's vast empire was posthumously carved up by his generals, Babylonia was granted to Seleucus. It was the beginning of an empire that would last 250 years and come to cover much of the Middle East. The Seleucids attempted to impose Greek and Hellenic culture throughout their multi-ethnic territory, such as this statue of Heracles in Bisotun, Iran, but they were ultimately defeated by the Romans in 63 BCE.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE XIONGNU

When a confederation of nomadic peoples were brought together, they proved strength in numbers could pave the way for a truly dominant empire

Written by David Crookes

Occupying a region spanning the Eastern Asian Steppe (comprised of modern-day Mongolia, parts of northern China and ancient central Asia), groups of nomadic tribesmen would spend much of their lives seeking water and pasture, leading horses, cows and sheep from one place to another while learning to hunt, ride and produce their daily essentials.

The nomadic Xiongnu managed to dominate much of Central Asia for more than 500 years

More than that, however, they also proved themselves to be rather fierce warriors, picking up a strong - and lethal - feel for a bow and arrow from a very young age, and proving more than adept at using a spear or sword at close range. This stood them in good stead during battles against their neighbours on China's northern frontier as they sought grain, metal and silk during terrifying raids. By the 3rd century BCE, however, these separate far-flung groups began to form a dominant tribal confederation.

Such a move began in 209 BCE when Maodun - son of Touman, the supratribal leader of the Mongolian nomads - slowly but surely unified the various tribes. In doing so, he showed great determination, cunning and ruthlessness, not least because Touman had previously sought to overlook him as heir apparent, and promptly sent him as a hostage to a neighbouring tribe called the Yuezhi.

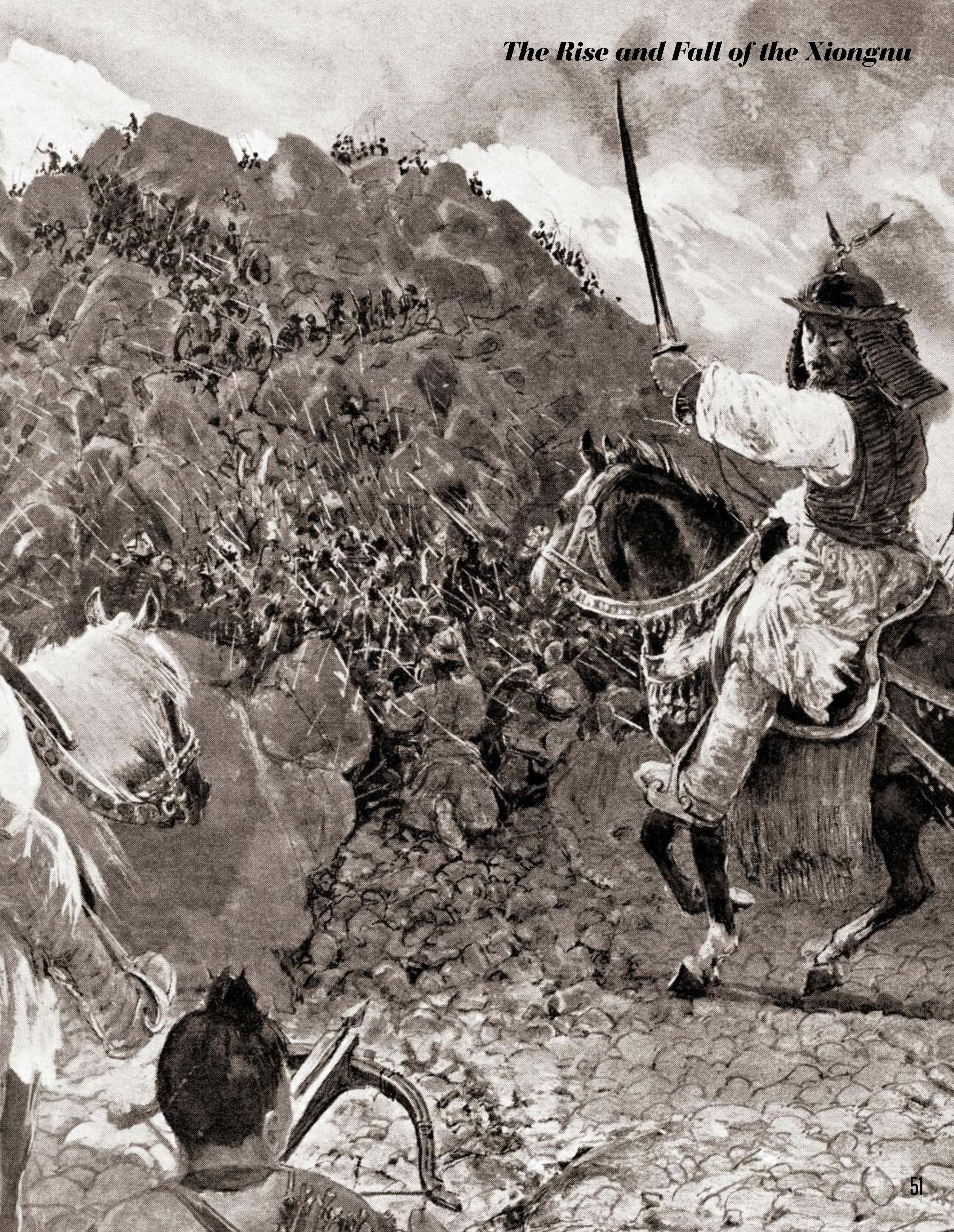
The idea was that Touman's warriors would attack the Yuezhi in the hope that Maodun's captors would retaliate and slaughter him. Instead, Maodun escaped by stealing a horse, prompting Touman to reward such bravery by making him commander of 10,000 horsemen.

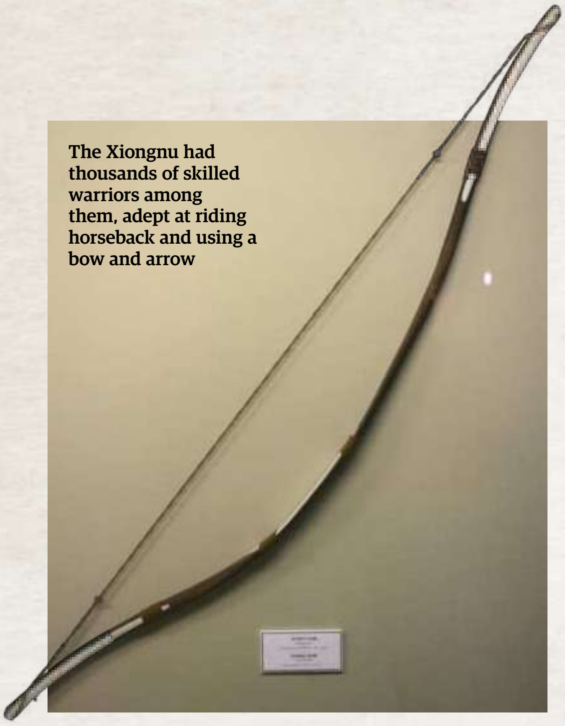
As it turned out, that was a bad move on Touman's part. Maodun's warriors became very loyal, and after testing them by ordering the shooting of his favourite horse and the execution of his favourite wife, he then got them to fire their arrows at his father. Those who subsequently failed to support him were also killed, but when the Qin dynasty looked to evict the Xiongnu from their pastures on the Yellow River in 215 BCE, the confederacy grew ever stronger. An empire was forming.

Maodun brought order to the Xiongnu peoples, but it remained a curious and wholly admirable ancient civilisation in which women were not only treated the same as men, but stood with them as warriors. They were also in a position of some considerable strength, which, given the threats to them, was entirely understandable. They could amass 300,000 archers on horseback, which proved vital in reclaiming lost lands.

They also came to be a structured, hierarchal people. Maodun created three tiers, placing the nomadic supreme rulers (or Chanyu) at the top of the tree, and putting imperial governors and local tribal leaders below them. Interestingly, the Chanyu were not surrounded by pomp and ceremony, and their role was primarily to collect and distribute booty among tribes. What's more, according to Sima Qian, the Chinese historian of the early Han dynasty who was born some 100 years later, age played a large part in the civilisation's structure - and experience didn't count for much.

Young men, he said, would eat the richest and best food, and be feted for their strength and youth, while those older would consume the leftovers since advanced age and weakness were qualities to be despised. Sima Qian revealed how everyone would eat the meat of domestic animals, however, and wear felt and fur wraps and hides, yet poor land meant they could not engage in agriculture so





The Xiongnu had thousands of skilled warriors among them, adept at riding horseback and using a bow and arrow

The Xiongnu's warrior women

Ancient jewellery was recently found on remains dating back to the 1st century BCE

The Xiongnu people had access to great luxuries in life thanks to subsidies from the Han, which comprised of, at the very least, annual payments of silk, wine, grain and other foodstuffs. They also appear to have enjoyed such spoils in death too, for numerous tombs have not only uncovered evidence of animal sacrifices but examples of pottery, objects made of bronze, iron, gold, stone and bone, and some very eye-catching jewellery.

In 2017, the skeletons of female Xiongnu warriors were discovered in Siberia some 2,200 years after their deaths. They were buried with their belts, each made from coal and encrusted with semiprecious jade, coral, turquoise and carnelian. There were also pieces of bronze designed to be worn on the shoulder, as well as examples of engravings that depicted a horse – a symbolic animal. Images of goats pierced by arrows were present too.

According to expedition leader Dr Marina Kilunovskaya of the Institute for the History of Material Culture in Saint Petersburg, Russia, female belts were also made from bronze, carrying the images of bulls, camels, horses and snakes. She says that the decorations would have been worn on special occasions, such as weddings and, as in this case, funerals.

they would seek communities that could give them grain, fruit and animal feed.

For most of the time, the Xiongnu were peaceful – or, at the very least, they sought to offer peace when it best fit with their needs. Certainly, in the early years of Maodun's reign that continued until 174 BCE, this multi-ethnic civilisation engaged in frequent battles – defeating the Yuezhi, absorbing tribes to the north of Inner Mongolia, and coming to occupy land that stretched from Lake Baikal to the north, the Liao River to the east and the Ordos Plateau to the south.

That said, their ethnic identity is not entirely known. Some suggest they were Mongolian, others claim Persian, and many say Turkic. What we do know, though, is that throughout this period, the Xiongnu continued to make the bulk of their money herding, although they also grew millet, barley and wheat as they took more agricultural lands under their belt and began to settle. They were also accomplished craftsmen, smelting iron and copper alloys, and creating ceramics, jewellery, tools and household utensils. It perhaps goes without saying that they hand-manufactured their own weapons, too.

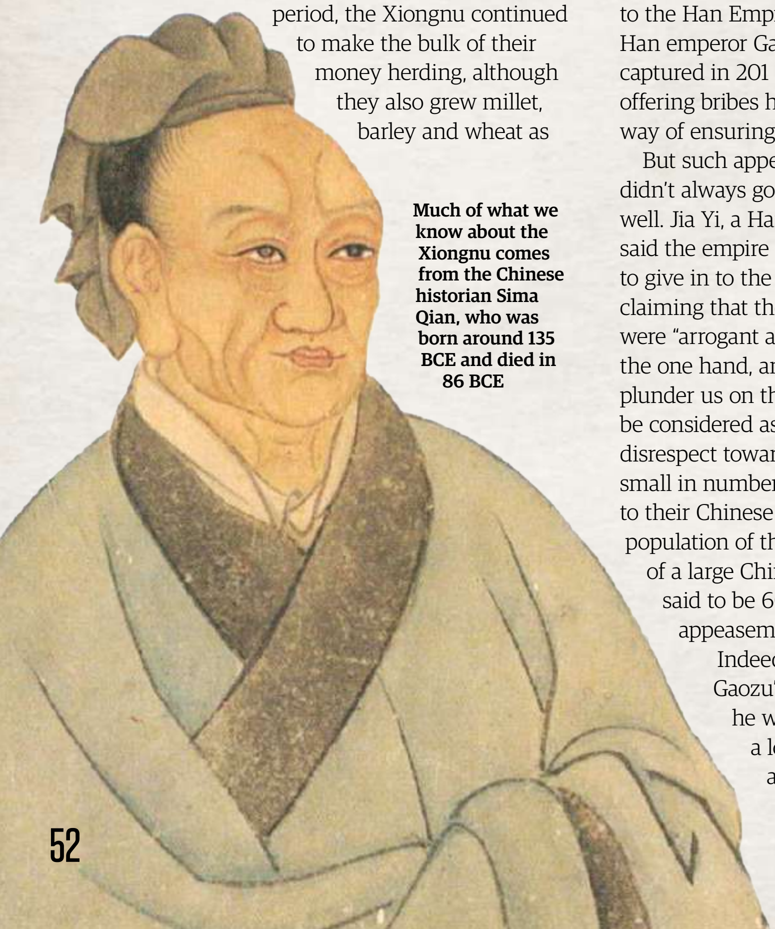
Such was their ferocity in using those weapons, the Chinese ended up striking deals in a bid to appease them, one of which saw the Xiongnu receiving silk, grain and wines each year as a way of lessening the threat to the Han Empire (the first Han emperor Gaozu had been captured in 201 BCE, and offering bribes had been a way of ensuring his release).

But such appeasement didn't always go down well. Jia Yi, a Han official, said the empire was wrong to give in to the demands, claiming that the Xiongnu were "arrogant and insolent on the one hand, and invade and plunder us on the other, which must be considered as an expression of extreme disrespect towards us". As if to underline how small in number the Xiongnu were in comparison to their Chinese neighbours, he said: "The population of the Xiongnu does not exceed that of a large Chinese district." The difference was said to be 60 million to 1.5 million, yet the appeasement continued.

Indeed, when Maodun asked to marry Gaozu's widow, Empress Lü, in 192 BCE, he wrote, almost comedically, "I am a lonesome ruler born in marshes and raised in plains populated by livestock." There was no way an offended Lü could act on her immediate instinct to exterminate the Xiongnu, since Maodun's army was too powerful. Rather, she avoided the proposal by referring to herself as "old and frail", said she was "losing hair and teeth", and urged Maodun not to "defile" himself. Han princesses were married to Xiongnu chieftains, however.

But then it was not unusual for men to have more than one wife. Note that Maodun had had his favourite wife killed, pointing to the fact that he had others. Such a situation was not confined to those in power within Xiongnu society, either. Any man could have multiple wives,

When the Xiongnu were defeated, they were replaced by the Xianbei, another nomadic tribal confederation



Much of what we know about the Xiongnu comes from the Chinese historian Sima Qian, who was born around 135 BCE and died in 86 BCE

A bronze seal handed to a Xiongnu chief by the Eastern Han dynasty, which says: "To Han obedient, friendly and loyal chief of Xiongnu"

New walls were built to protect the Qin dynasty from the Xiongnu people in the north, and this was expanded to the Great Wall of China that we see today

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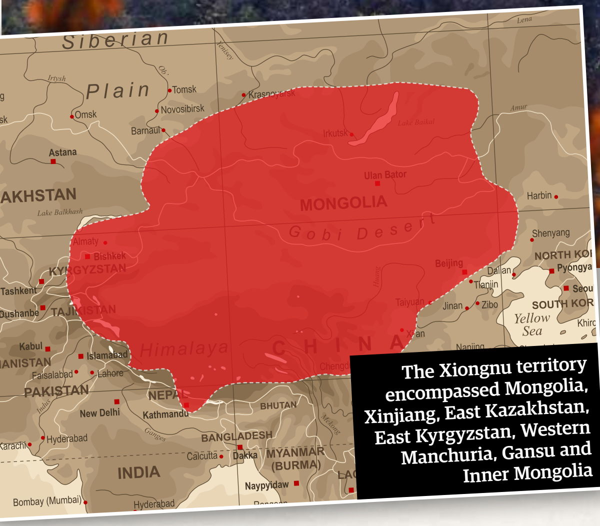
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Harbin
Shenyang
Almaty
Bishkek
KYRGYZSTAN
Tashkent
Dushanbe
Kabul
Islamabad
Lahore
Faisalabad
PAKISTAN
Himalaya
CHINA
Beijing
Dalian
Tianjin
NORTH KOI
Pyongya
Seoul
SOUTH KOR
Jinan
Zibo
Yellow Sea
New Delhi
Kathmandu
BHUTAN
BANGLADESH
Calcutta
Dakka
MYANMAR (BURMA)
Naypyidaw
INDIA
Hyderabad
Bombay (Mumbai)

The Xiongnu territory encompassed Mongolia, Xinjiang, East Kazakhstan, East Kyrgyzstan, Western Manchuria, Gansu and Inner Mongolia

and they sought to keep marriage in the family: if a man died, his widows would marry his younger brothers or any son they had not themselves given birth to. It would be worse if a great chief died, though. In such cases, the wives could end up slaughtered and laid to rest alongside him.

Indeed, sacrifices and ceremony were important to the Xiongnu. The blood of sacrificed white horses was drunk in special ceremonies, since such animals were held in high esteem as a symbol of battle, transport and life. The Xiongnu also worshipped the Sun and the Moon while revering Heaven, Earth and their ancestors, although such activities were not entirely unusual, and the Chinese would do the same. In that sense, they were following the Central Asian religion of Tengrism in which Heaven, Earth, spirits of nature and ancestors each provide for and protect humans. Even so, despite some overlaps in culture and outlook, the Han dynasty treated the Xiongnu with disdain, and yet they ended up rubbing alongside them for 250 years.

During that time, suspicion and apprehension was such that the Xiongnu's barbarian activities prompted the Chinese to build walls (China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, joined together small walls in the late 3rd century BCE to position his empire against those in the north, and they were subsequently expanded into the Great Wall). For a people who had never lived in walled cities, such barriers may have felt novel (we can't know for certain since there are no written records on the side of the Xiongnu), but it mainly shows how the two sides struggled to get along.

As if to underline this, the Xiongnu made life difficult for the Han dynasty during the creation of the Silk Road trade routes, and the Han-Xiongnu War between 133 BCE and 89 CE proved bloody. What's more, the Han dynasty, which ruled between 206 BCE and 220 CE, succeeded in taking land to the east and seizing vast swathes of the north by 104 BCE, leading to a loss of men and animals, and swung the balance of power away from the Xiongnu.

Further losses and gains would also come, but it was famine, plague and revolts that had a major impact between 44 and 46 CE. Eventually, there was a split into northern and southern Xiongnu as confederation tribes began to fall under Chinese command. From that point, power really did ebb away. The Xianbei crushed the north in 155 CE, and the south submitted to tributary relations with the Han. Yet there is no doubt the Xiongnu had made their mark as a once-great empire of tribes.

This statue is called 'Horse Stepping on a Xiongnu Soldier' and displays the might of the Western Han dynasty

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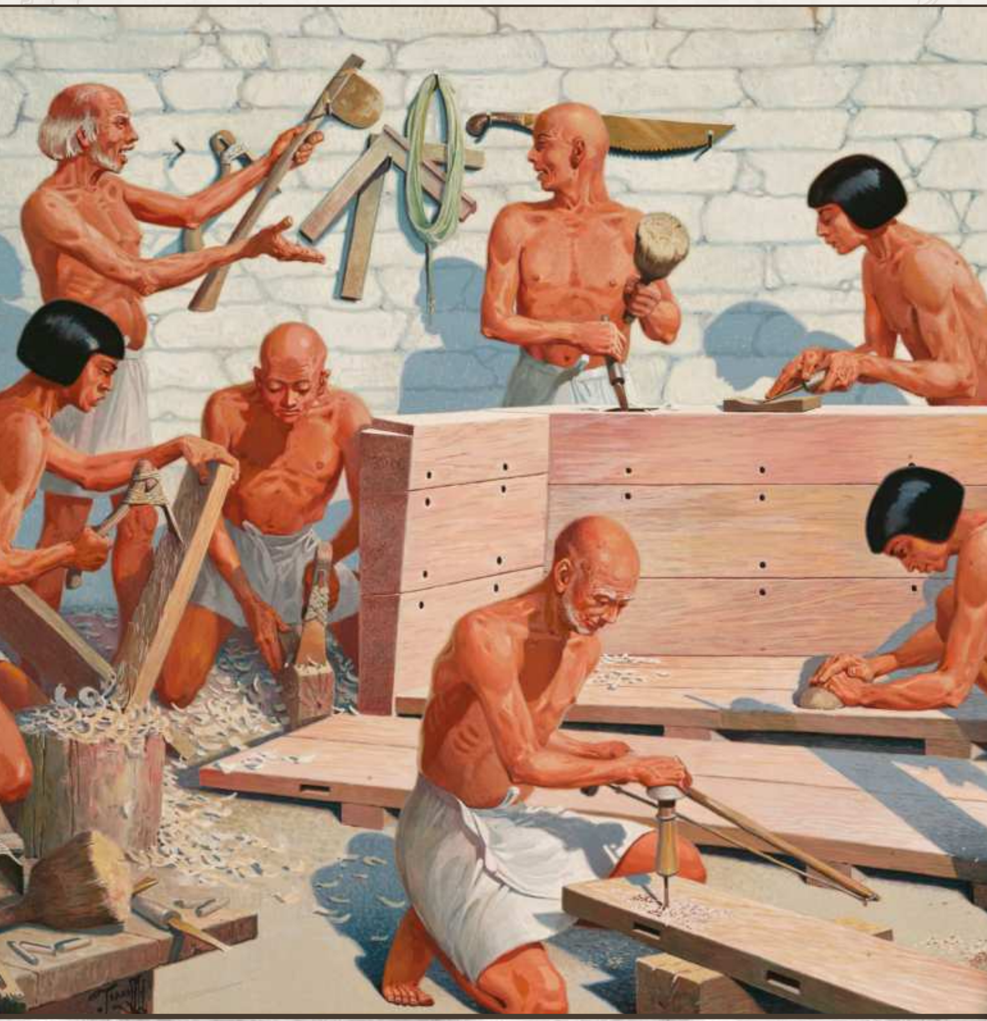
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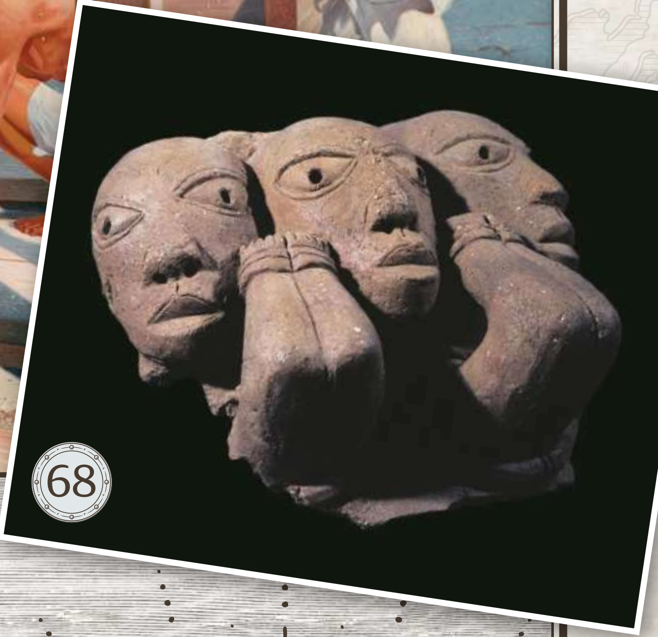
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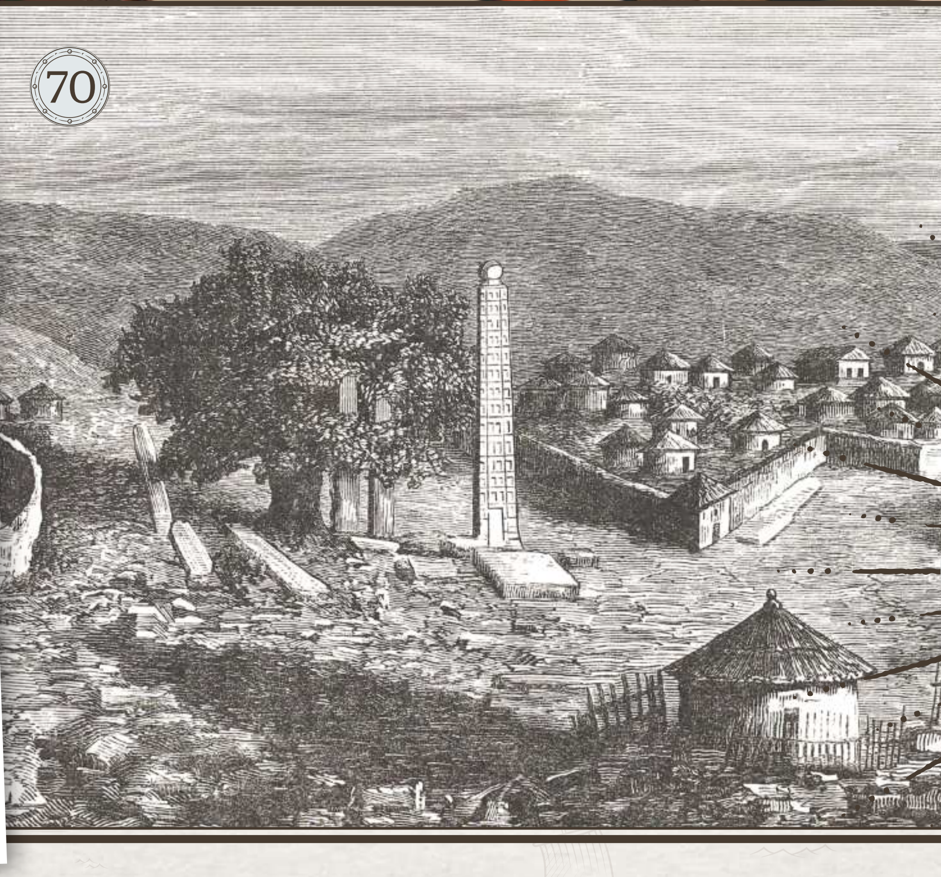
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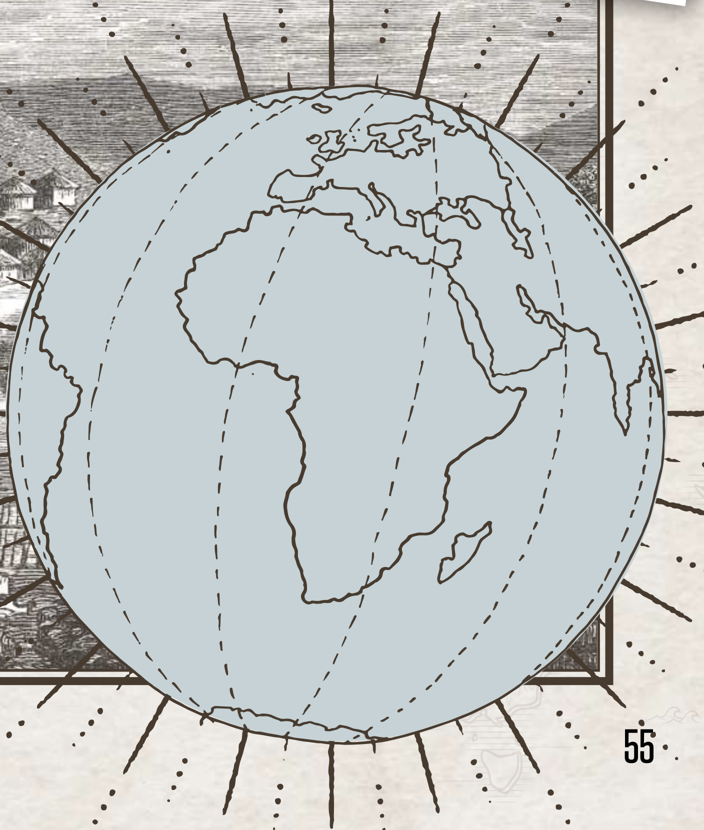
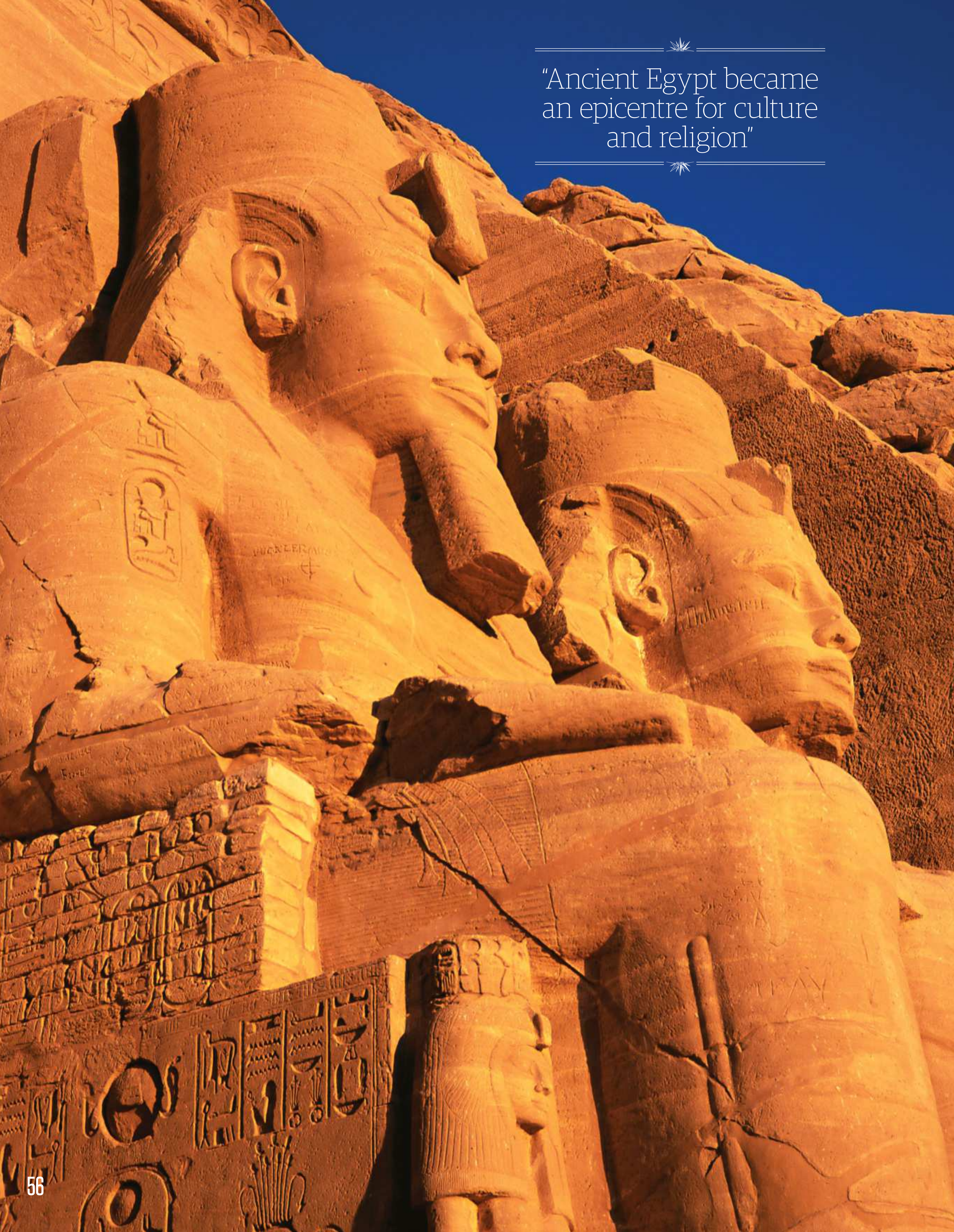




“Ancient Egypt became an epicentre for culture and religion”

THE KINGDOMS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Spanning many eras, the New, Middle and Old Kingdoms would see the pharaohs reach the peak of their power and Egyptian culture soar

For 3,000 years, the Ancient Egyptian empire endured. It emerged, like so many other independent kingdoms, from the ruins of warring and fragmented fiefdoms and grew into a nation that shook North Africa and the surrounding world to its core. It became an epicentre for culture and religion, where science and magic were intertwined as one. But those golden ages, those heights of human achievement that challenged even those of Greece and Rome at their peaks, were not achieved in a day.

When it came to the New Kingdom, the building of pyramids was considered unfashionable

Before the Assyrians came, before the Persians invaded, before the Greeks conquered and the Romans annexed, the Egyptians rose and fell all by themselves. While darker periods would form between them (three, in fact, known as the Intermediate Periods), the timeline of Ancient Egypt has been defined by three distinct eras: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom. A time of cultural rebirth and monumental construction, it was during the Old Kingdom that iconic structures that have endured millennia were built. The Middle Kingdom was when a nation was unified and forged anew. Then the realm was aggressively expanded and culture fostered like never before in the New Kingdom.

Ancient Egypt wasn't just an era of military conquest and expansion, it was a time of innovation too. The Egyptians invented early forms of cosmetics, including eye makeup; they were one of the first civilisations (alongside Mesopotamia) to evolve a robust written language; they created papyrus thousands of years before the Chinese produced paper; they designed the basic calendar structure that we still use today; they can even lay claim to inventing bowling and early forms of breath mints.

In short, they were a nation the like of which we've never seen before or again. Gods, pharaohs, pyramids, mummification, agriculture and much more helped to define the Ancient Egyptians as one of human history's most fascinating and intelligent civilisations.

Famous faces through time

Uncover the celebrities of each kingdom of this great civilisation

The Old Kingdom

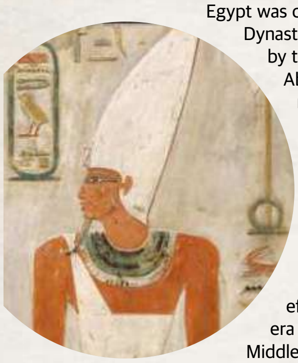
Djoser c.2670 BCE

Of all the kings that ruled Egypt in the infant years of the Old Kingdom, the pharaoh Djoser is perhaps the most influential. He may not have been the man who united Egypt as one in Narmer, but he typified two characteristics that would go on to define Ancient Egypt. He conducted military campaigns that solidified and expanded the borders of the empire while nurturing the growth of his nation's culture. He also commissioned the first pyramid on Egyptian soil; the Step Pyramid at Sakkara was the blueprint for pharaonic splendour and inspired future generations to build even greater examples.

The Middle Kingdom

Mentuhotep II 2061-10 BCE

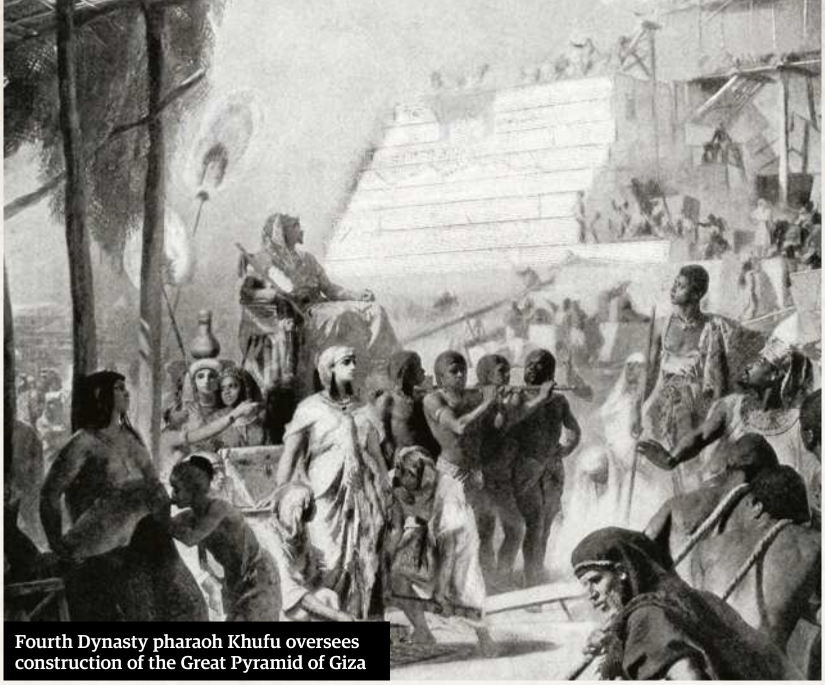
The kingdom splintered after the prosperity and expansion of the Old Kingdom. This mini dark age of sorts was known as the First Intermediate Period and saw Egypt divided by two competing dynasties. Lower Egypt was controlled by the Tenth Dynasty and Upper Egypt by the Theban Dynasty. About 14 years into his reign, Mentuhotep II had grown tired of the stalemate and attacked the Lower Egypt capital of Herakleopolis. He eventually broke the rival dynasty, unified the two realms and effectively founded the era now known as the Middle Kingdom.



The New Kingdom

Ramesses II 1279-13 BCE

Tutankhamun may be the most recognisable pharaoh, but King Tut's reign was a speck of Egyptian sand compared the power, influence and achievement of Ramesses II. The third pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty, Ramesses II, took an already prosperous kingdom and made it greater and grander than it had ever been. He expanded its borders, conquering Canaan and subduing everyone from the Nubians to the peoples of the Levant. He was also a prolific builder of monuments and temples, and even went as far as constructing his very own capital city, Pi-Ramesses.



Fourth Dynasty pharaoh Khufu oversees construction of the Great Pyramid of Giza

Tomb art from the Old Kingdom

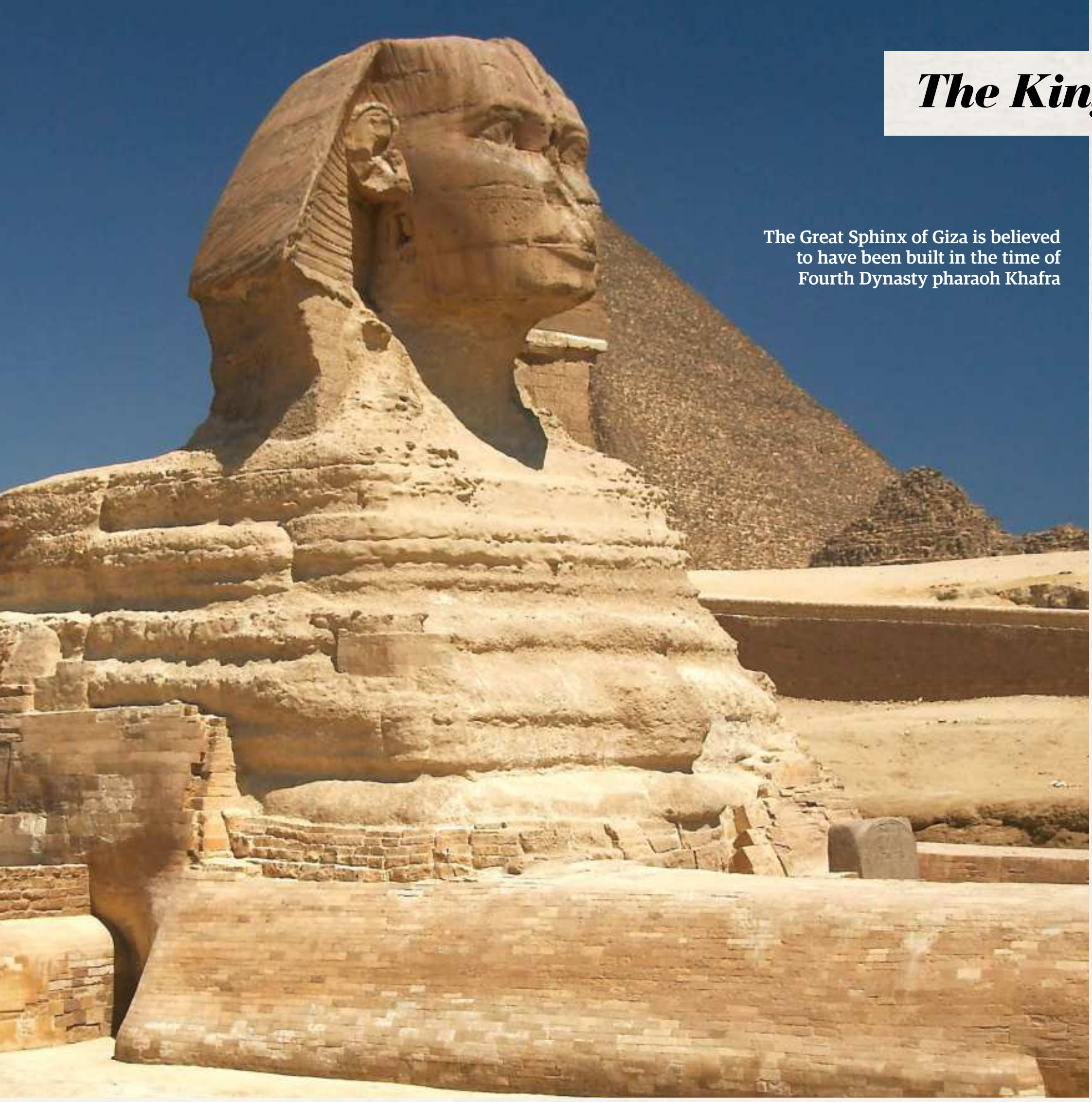
THE OLD KINGDOM

A time of rebirth, the Old Kingdom saw the introduction of the first pharaoh, dynasty and pyramid to the world

Prior to the Old Kingdom, in an era known as the Predynastic, Prehistoric or Protodynastic Period, Egypt was going through something of a transformation. The nation was divided into colonies, each with their own lords and rulers. The north and south of the country were also very distinct in both practices and culture, with the city of Hierakonpolis the capital of the south and Bes the capital of the north.

Excavations over the last century have radically changed the way we view Egypt prior to the Old Kingdom, including the fact that the First Dynasty and the rise of Narmer was not an overnight process. Upper Egypt, the more affluent of the two states, had three main cities – Thinis, Nekhen and Naqada. One by one, these states conquered one another or merged, and by about 3100 BCE, Egypt emerged as one whole state with the warrior pharaoh Narmer at its head. Two dynasties followed this founding during a period known as the Early Dynastic Period, and it was here that the blueprint for the Old Kingdom was forged. Memphis became the capital and Abydos the religious epicentre. Even architecture and the arts began to approach the classical Egyptian form at this time. The Old Kingdom began in about 2686 BCE, with the formation of the Third Egyptian Dynasty. The term 'Old Kingdom' was introduced by 18th-century historians and is used broadly to signify the first of three peaks of Egyptian civilisation. Often referred to as the 'Age of the Pyramids', the Old Kingdom saw Egypt nurture every aspect that would make it great. From the Third Dynasty and its first pharaoh, Djoser, to the apparent last king of the Sixth, Netjerkare Siptah, the nation was transformed into a cultural and military powerhouse.

The pyramids are a symbol of this era, and the template for these monumental icons began in the reign of Djoser. His vizier and closest adviser, Imhotep (who would be deified in generations to come as a demigod and god of healing) was the architect behind the Pyramid of Djoser, and his designs were a significant leap in engineering in Ancient Egypt. Prior to Djoser, kings were buried in rectangular, flat-roofed tombs called mastabas, but the Third Dynasty's founder desired immortality in death by means of a tomb worthy of a divine ruler. Imhotep's revolutionary design, stacking squared versions of mastabas on top of one another to create a pyramid, created the jewel in the king's



The Great Sphinx of Giza is believed to have been built in the time of Fourth Dynasty pharaoh Khafra

rebuilt kingdom. A grand necropolis, a symbol of the enduring Ancient Egyptian reverence for death, surrounds it and the finished article would go on to inspire pharaohs for generations to come.

The grandeur of the Step Pyramid (the Pyramid of Djoser) at Sakkara wasn't lost on those who followed in Djoser's footsteps. By the time that the Fourth Dynasty kings were ruling over Egypt (2613-2498 BCE), a new set of pyramids were forming. The Fourth Dynasty is considered the 'golden age' of the Old Kingdom, the very peak of prosperity. The economy was thriving thanks to a peaceful realm and open trade routes with its neighbouring nations. As with every peaceful period of Ancient Egypt, a spree of construction swept the nation.

> The Old Kingdom boasted a strong centralised administration from the capital of Memphis

Khufu, the second pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty, was the man who created a monument so grand that it would eventually be named one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the Great Pyramid of Giza. Built over a two-decade period, the 146.5-metre-high structure was a feat of engineering that put even Imhotep's Step Pyramid in Sakkara to shame. Giza would become the site of many more pyramids and temples, known as the Giza Necropolis. The Giza Pyramid became the pinnacle of pyramid design in Egypt and it would remain the tallest man-made structure for a staggering 3,800 years. It served as a testament to the power of the pharaohs and the enduring potency of the many Egyptian gods.

The Fifth Dynasty of Ancient Egypt (2498-2345 BCE) saw an evolution of theological practices across the entire nation, with certain cults growing in prominence (gods rose and fell in popularity, and usually those favoured by a particular dynasty or geographically important location were able to survive obscurity). The Cult of Ra (god of the noon sun) and the Cult of Osiris (god of the afterlife) rose significantly in popularity during this period of time.

The Egyptian economy was also booming, with the influx of goods like ebony, gold, myrrh and frankincense growing all the time. The Egyptians pushed their trading boundaries even further with agreements with Lebanon and modern-day Somalia. In short, it was a time of enterprise without the fear of invasion or war.

This economic strength bled into the Sixth Dynasty (2345-2181 BCE), as did the growing popularity of the inscription of spells and incantations inside burial chambers and tombs. Known commonly as the Pyramid Texts, these inscriptions would form the basis of the Book of the Dead.

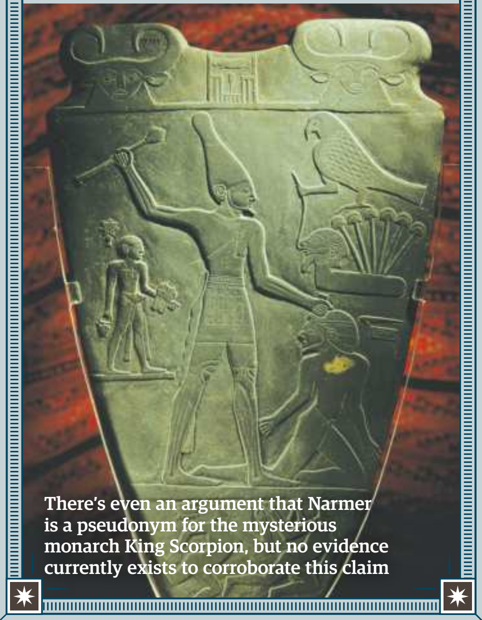
The first pharaoh

Who was the man who unified two distinctly different halves of the same realm and set the stage for the Old Kingdom period?

The Old Kingdom was the first true age of prosperity and progress for Egypt, but it would have been nothing without the two dynasties that came before it and the man who founded the pharaonic line to begin with. That man was Narmer and, much like many of the leaders and radicals who changed history in the post-Neolithic world, he is a man steeped in myth, legend and mystery. Nevertheless, his actions and decisions at the beginning of the First Dynasty set the precedent for the 29 others that would follow.

Narmer ruled sometime during the 31st century BCE and became the first man to unite the states of Upper and Lower Egypt. Of course, for an event that happened so far back in prehistory, most of the information we have comes from references found in tombs and the conclusions drawn by Egyptologists and historians, but there are some intriguing details we can take from them.

Seal impressions found in tombs at Abydos linked to the pharaohs Qa'a and Den (both of whom ruled, to the best of our knowledge, after Narmer during the First Dynasty) cite a list of ancient kings that name Narmer as the first. There have even been stone vessels (elaborate vases) found in the Step Pyramid tomb of Djoser that pay tribute to Narmer, perhaps expressing an intended connection with the founder and his way of life. Some historians argue that a ruler by the name of Menes was in fact the founder of founders, while others theorise Narmer and Menes were one and the same.



There's even an argument that Narmer is a pseudonym for the mysterious monarch King Scorpion, but no evidence currently exists to corroborate this claim

THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Once again divided and once again whole, Ancient Egypt rose from its own ashes to become a military and cultural powerhouse

For every period of greatness and monumental achievement in Ancient Egypt's history, there is a stretch of time where governments crumbled, territories divided and the nation fell into a dark lull. As the royal hold on the country fell apart towards the end of the Old Kingdom, Egypt was plunged into an era of uncertainty that is referred to as the First Intermediate Period.

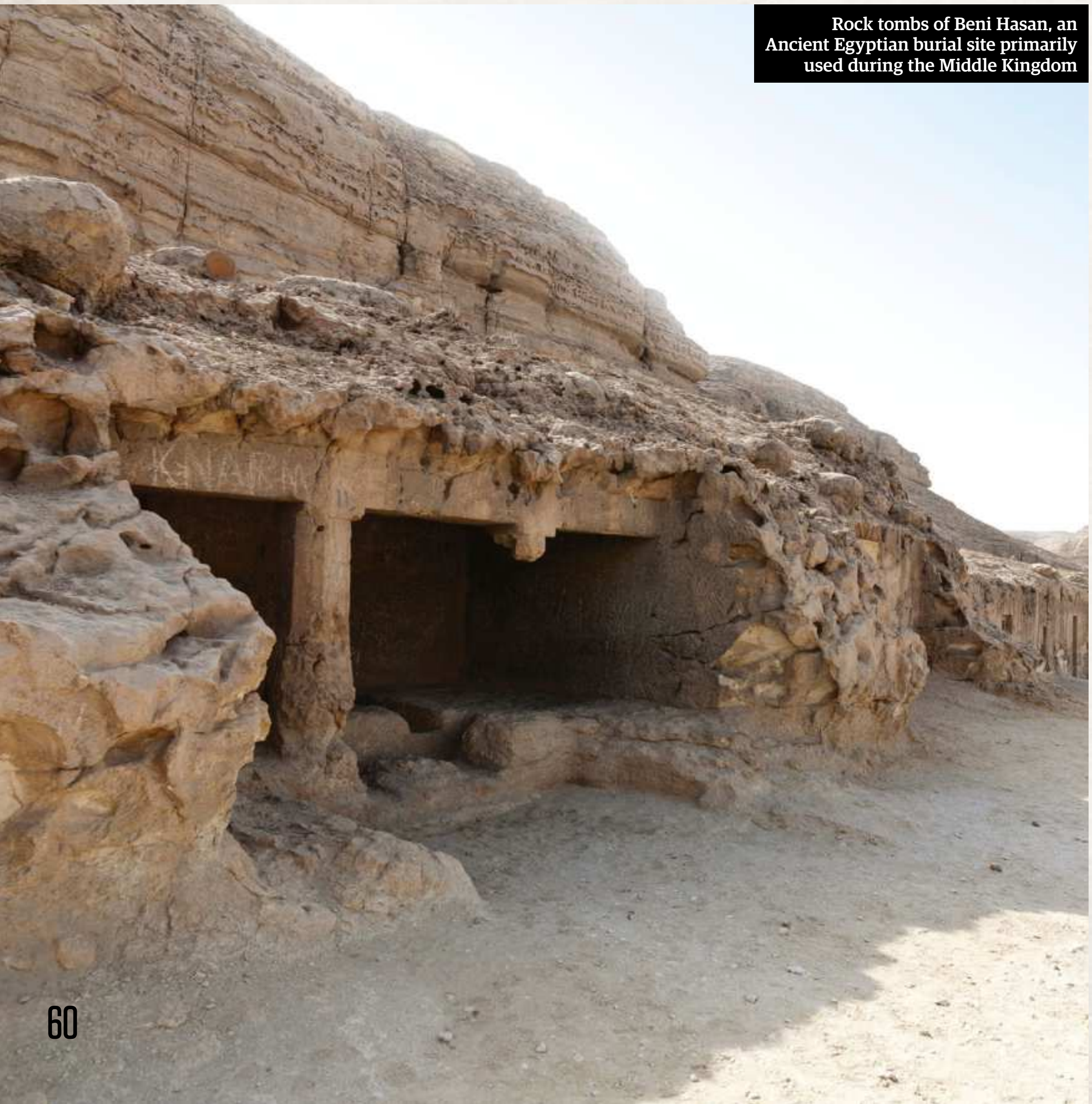
To make matters worse, the power of the pharaoh was splintered when two rival dynasties began vying for power – the Tenth Dynasty (based in Herakleopolis, the principal city of Lower Egypt) and the 11th Dynasty (centralised in Thebes, Upper Egypt). This period of conflict and dissention lasted for 125 years, until the reign of Theban pharaoh Mentuhotep II.

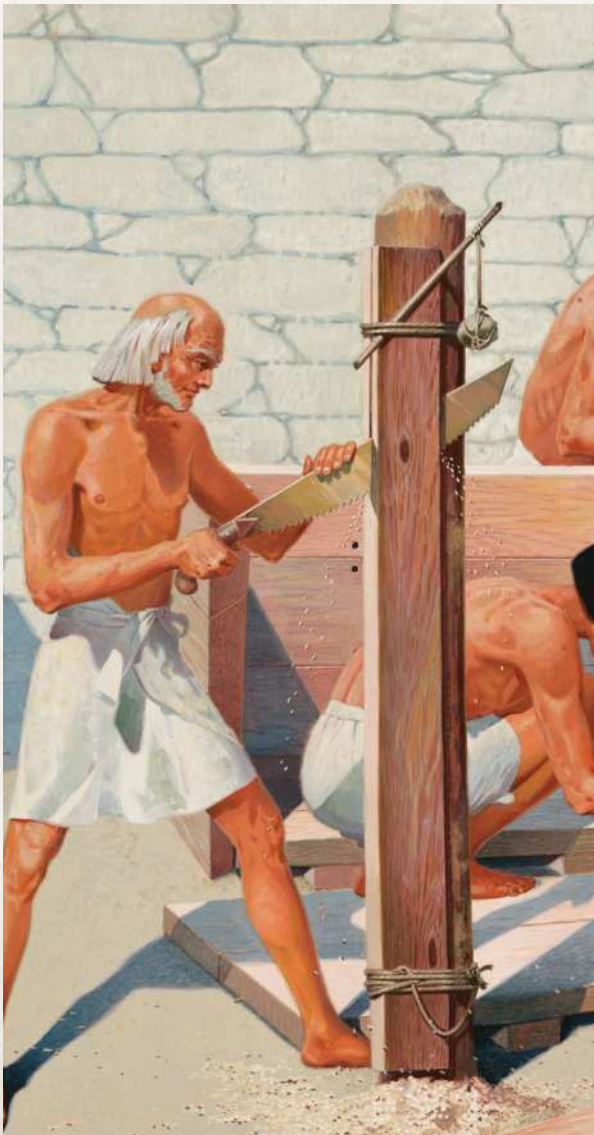
Ascending to the Upper Egypt throne in 2055 BCE, Mentuhotep II watched as the Tenth Dynasty began to destabilise with in-fighting and regular riots. In his 14th year of regnal rule, the Theban king took full advantage of revolt and attacked Herakleopolis. By the time of his arrival, there was barely a battle to be had, and the city, and the rest of the region as a result, were taken. He quelled what little resistance could be offered by the remaining rulers of the decaying Tenth Dynasty then set about reunifying the kingdom as one.

Such a task was not quick, taking a staggering 21 years to bring the Lower and Upper regions into line. He began by conducting a series of military campaigns to regain the territories lost during the dark time of the First Intermediate Period. He travelled south to the Second Cataract in Nubia, a region that had gained independence from its masters. Mentuhotep II brought the Nubians to heel before restoring Egyptian authority in the Sinai region. It was a ruthless expression of power in an era when authority was a long-forgotten force.

His consolidation of power in Egypt and efforts towards unifying the nation ushered in what we now know as the Middle Kingdom, and that effort was continued by his son and successor Mentuhotep III. His rule was brief by pharaonic standards (a mere 12 years) but he further accelerated the unification, including an expedition to retake Punt (an old trading partner of Egypt). The throne then passed to Mentuhotep IV, whose reign remains something of a mystery. His name is often omitted from lists of kings found in tombs through the Middle and New Kingdoms, suggesting his rule was a short one and ended abruptly.

The Turin Papyrus (otherwise known as the Turin King List) is one such document; it describes the period following Mentuhotep III's death as "seven kingless years". Information regarding the 'missing king' remains frustratingly scarce, but some details suggest a coup of sorts may have taken place. Records found at Wadi Hammamat, a large mining region in ancient times, do attest to his reign and make reference to expeditions to quarry stone for monuments. The records name a vizier, Amenemhat, as its commander. Whether or not this is the same Amenemhat that would eventually assume the throne, we cannot know for sure. However, it certainly seems likely.


Rock tombs of Beni Hasan, an Ancient Egyptian burial site primarily used during the Middle Kingdom



So began the next dynasty, with Amenemhat I at its head. He began by moving the capital back to Memphis (the capital during the Old Kingdom), as well as forming a standing army – an asset his successors would maintain for the rest of the dynasty. The new king began fortifying the country's borders, especially those between Egypt and Asia, where he erected the Walls of the Ruler in the East Delta. In fact, Amenemhat I rebuilt or built new fortifications all around Egypt, transforming the ancient nation's military strategy from expansion to simple defence.

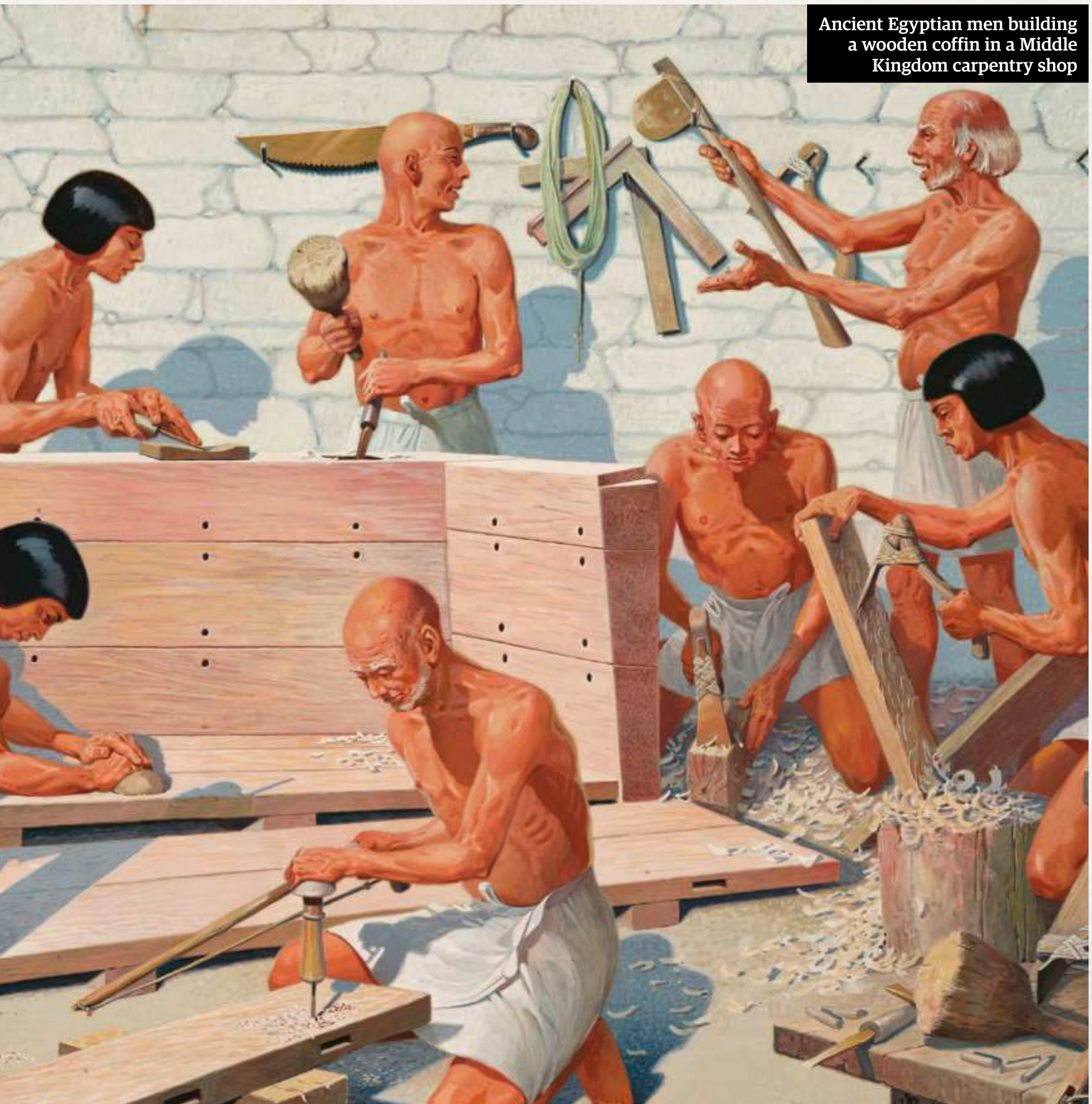
Amenemhat I would eventually begin a co-regency with his son, Senusret, before the elder king was assassinated – supposedly by his own guards. His successor, now Senusret I, began a more expansive series of military campaigns before eventually entering a co-regency with his own son, Amenemhat II. His son enjoyed a relatively peaceful reign of his kingdom and eventually chose a traditional joint rule with his successor, Senusret II. The new pharaoh focused mainly on the maintenance of the realm, building a pyramid at el-Lahun as well as attempting to convert the Faiyum oasis into workable farmland.

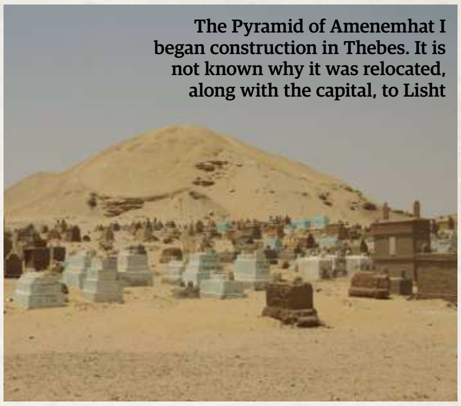
Under the sole rule of his successor Senusret III, the Middle Kingdom enjoyed the peak of its power and influence. The new warrior king was unlike anything the era had ever seen before – he represented a mind-set from a long-forgotten era, an aggressive hunger to expand the kingdom and conquer new lands. He moved a huge army north of the kingdom and attacked the Nubians relentlessly, punishing them into surrender before finally claiming considerable Nubian territories.

His successor, Amenemhat III, is famed for his radical approach to construction. He took advantage of the country's limestone and sandstone quarries like never before, beginning a huge programme of building that spread across the entire kingdom.

Amenemhat's son, Amenemhat IV, has a poorly recorded rule but his successor, Sobekneferu, became the first recorded female Egyptian ruler in the country's history, although her reign lasted only four years.

> During the Middle Kingdom, the elevated flood levels of the Nile boosted agriculture and buoyed the economy


Ancient Egyptian men building a wooden coffin in a Middle Kingdom carpentry shop


The Pyramid of Amenemhat I began construction in Thebes. It is not known why it was relocated, along with the capital, to Lisht

The feudal governments of the Middle Kingdom

In the Old Kingdom before it and the New Kingdom that followed, the pharaoh's rule was absolute. Priests, nobles and even the queen herself could act, with consent, on the king's behalf, but for the most part, the pharaoh answered to no one but the gods. However, that definitive rule came under threat when the Old Kingdom crumbled and splintered into two separate realms. With two dynasties now vying for power, the normal authoritative structure of the kingdom was in ruins.

Prior to the rise of the pharaohs, the entire country was divided into small administrative colonies known as nomes. Each nome had an appointed leader, or nomarch, and it was these independent city-states that the first pharaoh had to unite in order to establish Egypt as a single nation.

Even after unification, the nomarchs – 20 of whom were based in Lower Egypt and 22 in Upper Egypt – remained. However, they existed more as regional officials who would report directly to the royal court. As the country entered the First Intermediate Period, these nomes began to assume autonomy once again. By the time of reunification, new sole pharaoh Amenemhat I found these states unwilling to bend the knee entirely. The position of nomarch was considered hereditary (rather than being subject to the king's discretion), an issue made all the worse by marriages that created powerful alliances between multiple nomes. In order to maintain peace in the kingdom, Amenemhat was forced to agree to an alliance of sorts, creating a bizarre feudal system that lasted until the reign of Senusret III.

THE NEW KINGDOM

The last great age of Ancient Egypt was its grandest yet – an era of economic enterprise, domestic beautification and military expansion

Lasting from the 16th to 11th century BCE, the New Kingdom saw Ancient Egypt transformed. Its kings and queens both looked ahead at the promising future of the realm and back in the hope of emulating the monarchs of the past. The empire was expanded by the sword of warrior kings, while the realm itself was rebuilt from the ground up by a new economic prosperity. This was Ancient Egypt at its peak, as reflected in the resultant boom in arts and culture.

The New Kingdom was preceded by another fracture known as the Second Intermediate Period. Towards the start of the 16th century BCE, a small warrior tribe known as the Hyksos had begun settling in the fertile land of the Delta (a group of rivers and tributaries that led into the Mediterranean Sea). By the time the pharaoh in Thebes realised what was happening, it was too late. The Hyksos were fearsome warriors who used advanced weaponry – mainly cavalry, chariots and powerful compound bows – and who were comfortably settled. The 15th Dynasty was established and lasted for more than 150 years, but the Hyksos presence divided Egypt in two, with the invaders controlling Lower Egypt while the Thebans ruled Upper Egypt. Kings made many efforts to defeat the Hyksos, but the tribesmen were seasoned warriors and weren't so easily deterred.

Mortuary beliefs developed during this era, leading to an influx of talismans and amulets for protection in the afterlife

It wasn't until the time of Ahmose I, the first pharaoh of the 17th Dynasty, that everything changed.

Having watched his family fail to banish the Hyksos, Ahmose I raised a huge army and met the Hyksos with unrelenting force. Over many years he pummelled the borders, slowly driving the Hyksos back. Eventually, the Theban pharaoh drove the occupying forces from his homeland and set about restoring Egypt to its former glory.

With Egypt unified, the 17th Dynasty's founder began an expansive series of military campaigns that added new territories to the realm while regaining lands lost in the Second Intermediate Period. These conquests brought new wealth into the economy – it re-energised the construction of temples and monuments and enabled Ahmose I to rebuild the decorated nation of old.

Ahmose I's desire to restore Egypt to its former greatness would be reflected in the actions of the kings and queens who followed. Amenhotep III rebuilt monuments, tombs and statues on a scale never seen before, solidifying the bubbling new culture of arts and expression.

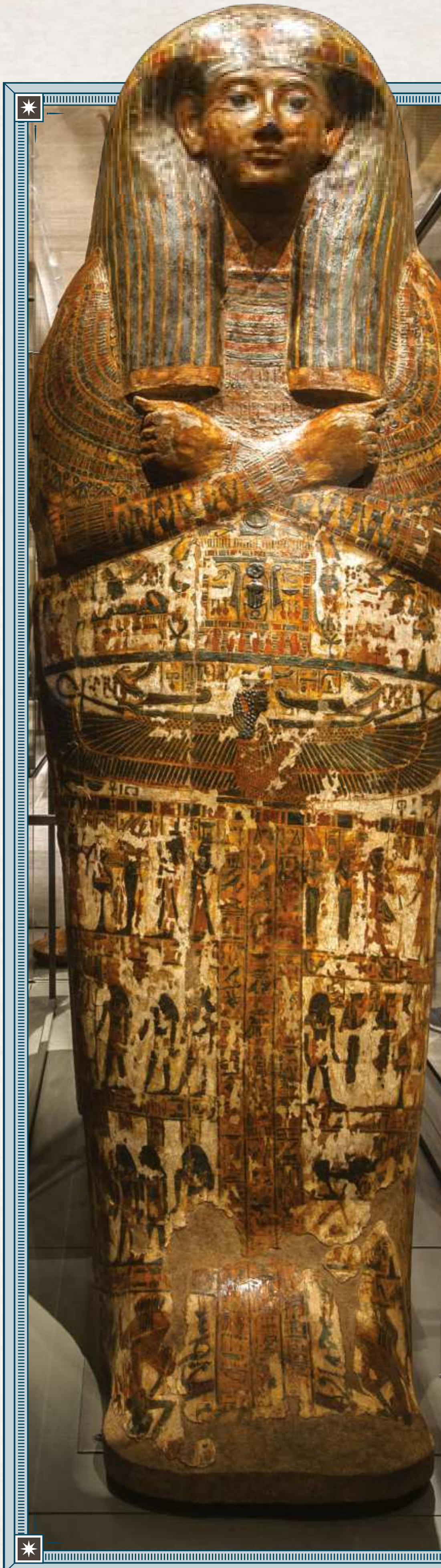
Queen Hatshepsut was the first woman to take the title of pharaoh, and she helped nurture the country's economy, including expeditions to Punt and other trading posts. Thutmose III created one of the most impressive armies ever assembled by a pharaoh and used it to expand Egypt's borders with conquest after conquest. The 18th Dynasty was a time of achievement on multiple fronts, but like any age of success, there was also a catch.

That blip came in the form of Amenhotep IV, also known as Akhenaten. A religious zealot who despised the power of the Church of Amun (the patron god of the Theban kings), Akhenaten did not believe in the polytheistic practices that had defined Egyptian theology since the country's earliest times. He outlawed the worship of any god other than his chosen deity, Aten, and forced the country into massive religious upheaval.

The Amarna Period, as it would come to be known, only lasted 16 years, but the damage was already done. The upheaval was so universally despised that Akhenaten was branded the 'Heretic Pharaoh', even by his own son and future pharaoh Tutankhamun. His legacy was summarily expunged from many future histories and a course was set to bring Egypt back to its former glory.

The dynasty that followed pushed Egypt's prosperity to new heights. The most notable pharaoh of the period, Ramesses II, took the great armies formed by Thutmose III and weaved a military campaign that moulded Egypt into its most powerful form. He sired a considerable number of children (most of whom he outlived) and built a huge tomb and necropolis in the Valley of the Kings.

Like the 19th Dynasty, the 20th was also defined by the legacy of one man: Ramesses III. However, while Ramesses II would strengthen his nation, his descendent would ultimately weaken it by draining the treasury with unsuccessful military campaigns and defensive operations. It was his mismanagement of the crown that eventually set about the slow decline of the New Kingdom and the native pharaonic line as a whole.



What happened next?

Following the end of the New Kingdom and its final golden age, what was next for this ancient civilisation?

While the period we have come to know as Ancient Egypt officially ended with the death of Cleopatra VII and its addition to the Roman Empire in 30 BCE, its true demise could actually be attributed to the death of Ramesses XI. The span of time that followed, the Third Intermediate Period, saw the power of the pharaohs start to deteriorate as political in-fighting took hold.

The period lasted about 350 years and was split into three stages: the first saw the rule of the country divided between the 21st Dynasty (which controlled Lower Egypt) and the High Priests of Amun at Thebes (which ruled most of Middle and Upper Egypt). The two states existed in relatively peaceful harmony. The second period saw the country reunited thanks to the rise of the 22nd Dynasty and new king Shoshenq I – the Libyan monarchy came to power in about 945 BCE, expanding out from the East Delta to control the entire nation. Once the country's bitter enemy, the Libyans now ruled Egypt as native Egyptians. The country began to destabilise once again under the rule of the 22nd Dynasty in 850 BCE, and by 818 BCE, a rival 23rd Dynasty had risen, which then caused the nation to fragment into warring states.

The country would eventually fall to a Nubian invasion, lasting 25 years. This marked a trend for the coming centuries as Egypt's grand native history was buried by an Assyrian, Persian and eventual Greek invasion during the subsequent Late Period. In short, the nation had fragmented so far from the stable centralised structure of the three kingdom eras that it ultimately benefited from the stability outside rule brought with it.

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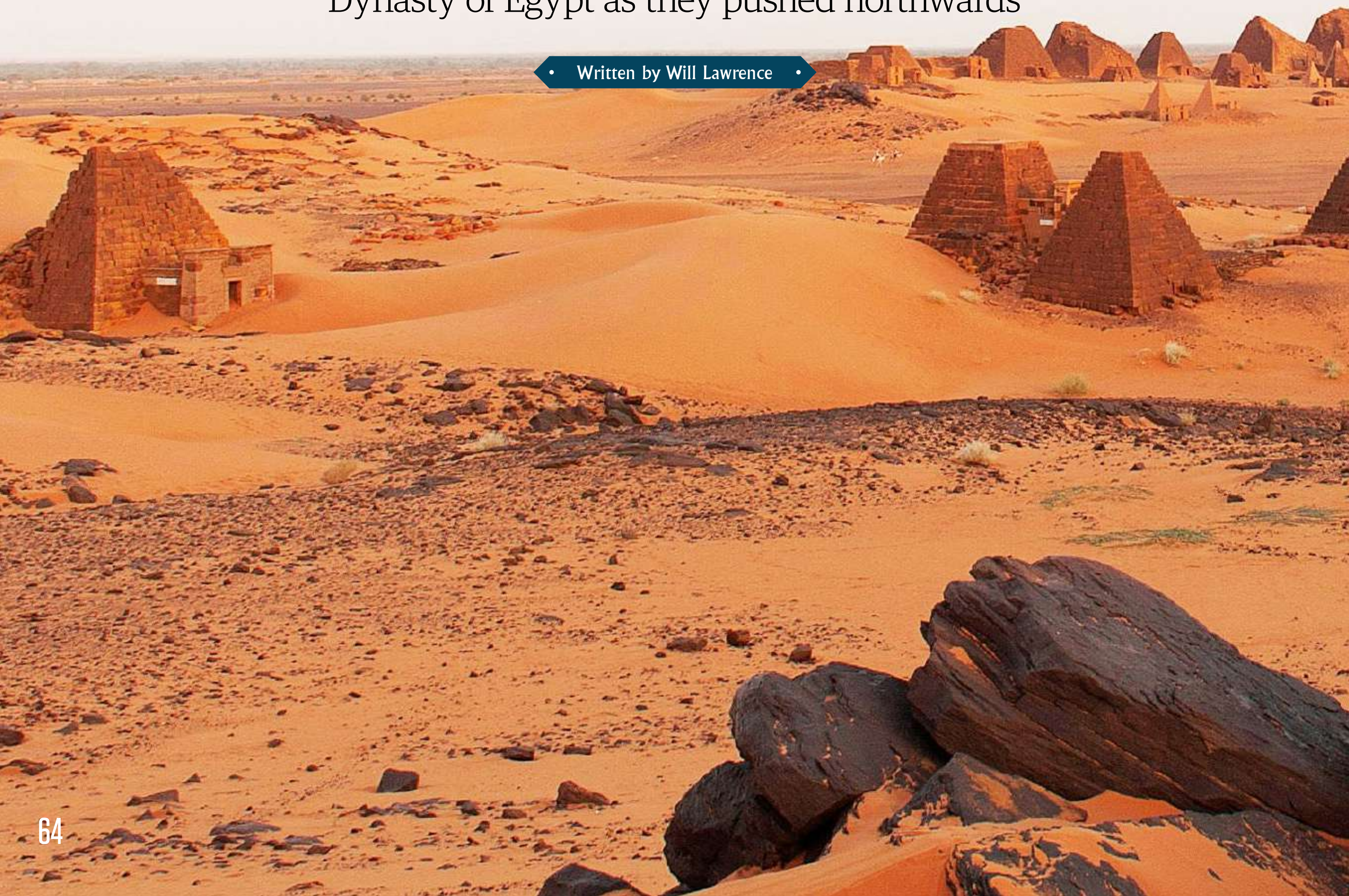
KINGDOM OF KUSH

Egypt's southern neighbours forged an empire that lasted for more than a thousand years, establishing the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt as they pushed northwards

Written by Will Lawrence



When Rome was nothing more than a village on the River Tiber and the Greek city-states ruled tiny tracts of land, the mighty Kingdom of Kush held sway over an empire that stretched from central Sudan to the Palestinian borderlands. Its rulers flourished for a millennium, outlasted the golden ages of Athens, Sparta and Macedonia, and witnessed both the growth and much of the decline of the Roman Empire.

And yet here is a kingdom that to history has been perennially overshadowed by the ancient Egyptians, their famous neighbours to the north, even though, for a time, Egypt too fell under Kushite control. When the Kushites were finally expelled from Egypt at the hands of the Assyrians, their homeland dwindled to a place of peripheral influence and, says one leading historian, "increasingly found itself at the end of a cul-de-sac in the Nile valley, the exit to which was always blocked by a strong power to the north." Yet still it endured, and its inhabitants prospered. Today, the area that made up the Kingdom of Kush is more commonly known as Nubia, which derives its name from the people who moved into the vacuum that formed when the Kushite state finally collapsed in the 4th century CE.

The Kingdom of Kush finds its origins in a powerful state that formed in the 3rd millennium BCE, taking advantage of its position on the Middle Nile where it stood as a gateway for trade, ferrying the rich materials from the south, like gold and jewels, to the consumer markets in the north. The state through which this trade route flowed held its capital at Kerma, just upstream of what is now cited as the Third Nile Cataract. Kerma enjoyed a prosperous reign until, during the period around 1750-1650 BCE, a people called the Hyksos rose to power in the Nile Delta.

Initially, the people of Kerma forged an alliance with the Hyksos and pushed further north, taking the Egyptian fortresses of the Second Cataract. Eventually, however, the pharaohs rallied, and Amosis (1570-46 BCE) reunited Egypt and defeated the Hyksos in battle. The New Kingdom of Egypt then exacted vengeance for the Kerma land-grab, and the kingdom was crushed; the pharaohs Thutmose I and Thutmose III enforced an Egyptian military presence in the area. It was to commemorate Thutmose I's campaigns that his son oversaw the famous inscription that speaks of his return from overthrowing the "wretched Kush".

Under Egyptian control, a syncretistic culture arose in Kush, influenced by trends in Egypt to the north and by the culture of the African peoples to the south. Kush's position on the trade routes from Egypt to the Red Sea, and from the Nile to the south and west, continued to bring considerable wealth to the region.

Egypt could not maintain control indefinitely, however, and by the 9th century BCE there was little remaining evidence of the pharaohs' colonisation; the major cult centre at Napata had

> “Piye led the Kushite push into Egypt, which established the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt”

certainly fallen into ruin, and it is from this time that archaeologists begin to record data from a separate Kushite state. Gifts from the pharaoh to the Temple of Karnak in 827 BCE included gold from the region around Napata, which then became the seat of early Kushite kings, and this suggests that the two kingdoms were enjoying cordial diplomatic and trading relations despite the former, more precarious association.

Kings of Kush

Many Kushite rulers are shadowy figures, though we know something of a few great kings

Kashta

Mid 8th century BCE

The second king of the Napatan Empire of the Kushites, Kashta proved pivotal in the expansion into Egypt, and he laid the foundations for what would become the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. His only known wife was Pebatjma, and he was buried in the royal pyramid at el-Kurru.

Piye

c.752-c.721 BCE

Kashta’s successor completed the invasion of Egypt, and became the first pharaoh of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, which ruled Egypt until the Assyrian invasion. The length of his rule cannot be precisely dated, but it likely did not exceed 31 years.

Taharqo

690-664 BCE

The son of Piye, Taharqo oversaw a prosperous period in the Kushite history, and he proved a capable warlord, fighting as best he could the invasion of Egypt by the iron-wielding Assyrians. Despite inferior weapons, his troops recorded at least one famous victory.

Tanwetamani

664-653 BCE

The nephew of his predecessor, Tanwetamani sought to wrestle control of Egypt back from the Assyrians, and reoccupied all of Egypt including Memphis. The Assyrian response was swift and lethal, their re-conquest effectively ending Kushite influence over Egypt.

Aspelta

c.600-580 BCE

Kushite history becomes shadier after the fall of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, but Aspelta left monuments carved with historical details, and it’s been suggested that Assyrian incursions from the north encouraged Aspelta to move the Kushite capital from Napata to Meroë.

The early Kushite rulers are difficult to identify, and prior to Kashta, who led the Kushite expansion into Egypt during the 8th century BCE, we know only of Alara and Ary, and it seems as though they may be the same person. Kashta ruled Kush from Napata, which is around 300 miles north of Khartoum, the modern capital of Sudan, and he enjoyed considerable influence in Egypt, as evidenced by the installation of his daughter, Amenirdis I, as the presumptive God’s Wife of Amun in Thebes. Indeed, Kashta went on to extend Kushite control into Thebes and also Elephantine. His successor, Piye, then led the great Kushite push into Egypt, which established the Twenty-fifth Dynasty of Egypt. This period of Kushite pre-eminence is often referred to as the Napatan Empire, named after the state capital, and the Kushite kings ruled Egypt (in its entirety or in part) from 744 until 656 BCE.

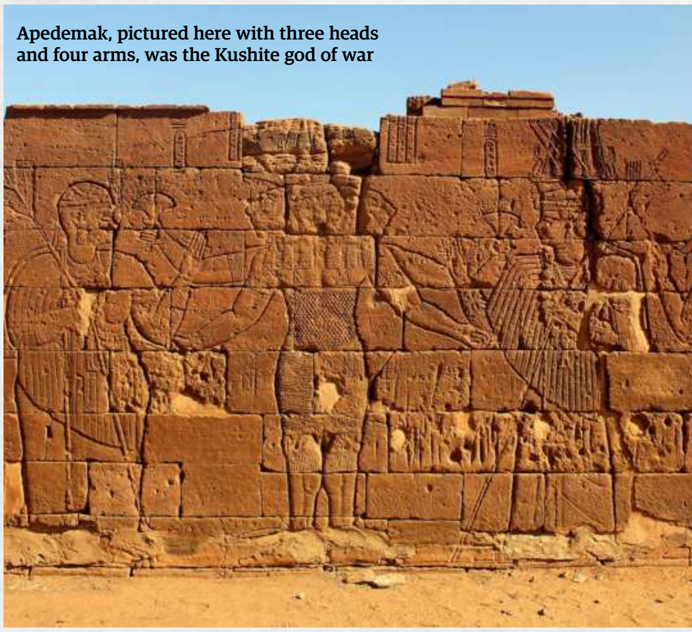
Meroë, the capital of the Kingdom of Kush, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2011

Given its proximity to and long historical connection with its northern neighbour, it is not surprising that Kushite culture at this stage greatly resembled that of the Egyptians. And, certainly, the Kushite kings appear to have entered Egypt “not as conquering barbarians,” one notable historian and archaeologist writes, “but as champions of the age-old traditions of the pharaohs.” The Kushite state’s great god, at least during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, was Amun, the great god of Egypt who had ruled almost unopposed since the 2nd millennium BCE.

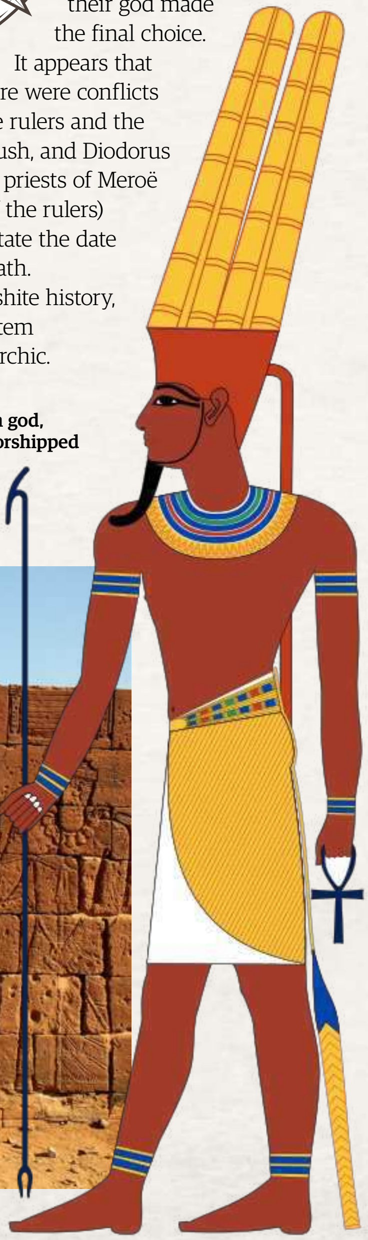
Though most rulers were male, there is a clear indication that queens too sat on the Kushite throne, and there is no reason to believe they were not rulers in their own right; the Bible in Acts 8:27 speaks of “Candace, queen of the Ethiopians”, while there are further sources that record the Kandake, the female ruler of Kush. Clearly, some confuse the generic name with the name of an actual ruler.

With regard to the succession, it seems that the most suitable candidate was chosen from a select band, who may or may not have been related to their predecessor, while the Ancient Greek historian Diodorus reports that the candidates were chosen by the priesthood from the most valorous Kushites before their god made the final choice.

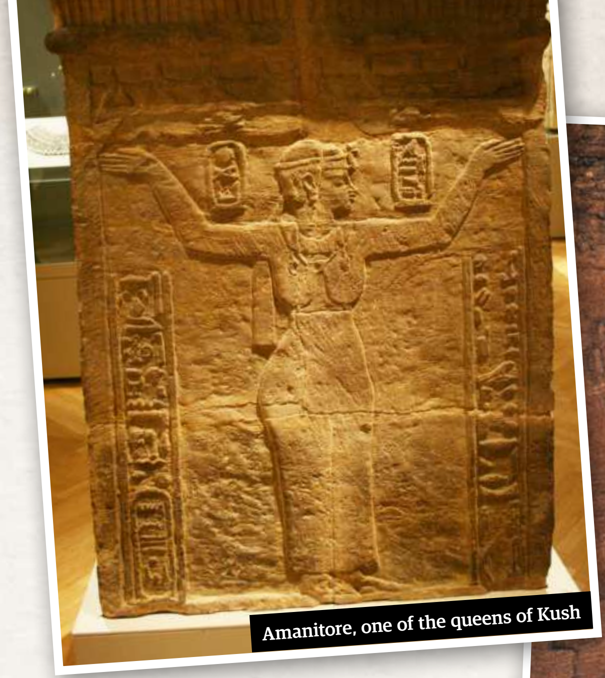
It appears that there were conflicts between the rulers and the priesthood in Kush, and Diodorus records that the priests of Meroë (the later seat of the rulers) were able to dictate the date of the ruler’s death. Throughout Kushite history, the political system remained monarchic.



Apedemak, pictured here with three heads and four arms, was the Kushite god of war

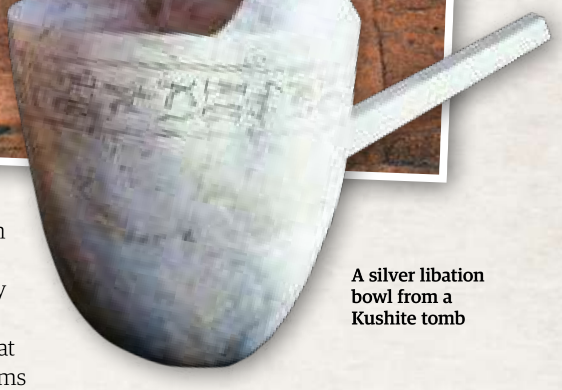


While an Egyptian god, Amun was also worshipped by the Kushites



Amanitore, one of the queens of Kush

A bas-relief found on the ruins of a temple dedicated to Amun



A silver libation bowl from a Kushite tomb

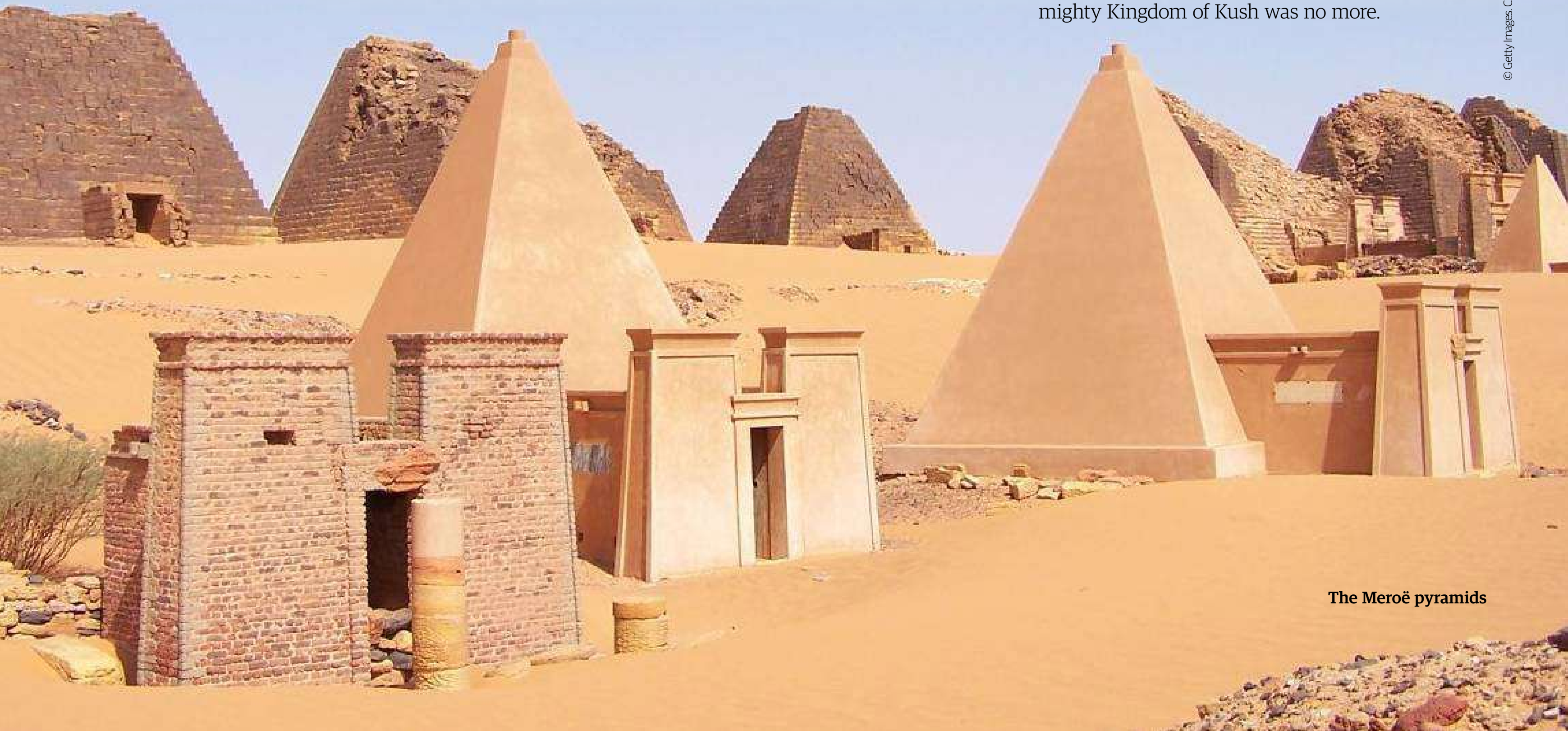
The army was of keen importance – the Egyptians appear to have regarded the denizens of the Kushite state as good bowmen and horse warriors – though not much is known about its composition and whether it was a professional body or a citizen militia called upon in times of need. There is evidence that some leaders did not fight with the army, while others such as Taharqo (690-664 BCE) and Akinidad (dates unknown, though he fought the Romans) appear as battle-ready warlords.

Herodotus records the presence of Kushite soldiers in the army of Xerxes that invaded Greece in the early 5th century, claiming they fought with javelins and knotted clubs, and that before battle they smeared their bodies with chalk and red ochre. Historians think the Kushite army may have used war elephants, like the Carthaginians, and the elephant does appear in Kushite art. The efficacy of the Kushite army is difficult to assess, though while the clashes between Kushites and Assyrians saw their expulsion from Egypt and the toppling of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, the warriors of Kush did record at least one notable victory, defeating the iron-wielding Assyrians in 674 BCE. Like many armies that faced Rome, the Kushites seem to have recorded little success, and the historian and geographer Strabo noted that they fled, badly beaten at the Battle of Pselchis in 23 BCE.

The artistic evidence that survives suggests that the people of Kush were dark-skinned, and it seems that by the later Kushite period, size was a desirable attribute for mortal women at least, and while the goddesses remained slim in their depictions, the earthly women are shown with considerable girth. Life expectancy was typical of the region during the period, and while Taharqo reigned for more than 25 years, dying at the age of 46 or 47, typical mortality would not have broached much more than 30 years of age.

Once forced from Egypt by the Assyrian invasion, the Kushites ruled the Middle Nile for more than 800 years and, protected as it was by the barren hills of Aswan, it retained its unique Egyptian-Nubian culture, while that of Egypt fell prey to Persian, Greek and Roman influence. The Kushites developed and retained their own language, which has confused linguists ever since its discovery, and they preserved their own gods – like Apedemak, Sebiumeker and Arensnuphis – as well as adopting the great Egyptian deities. Their funerary rites involved burying their rulers in pyramids, though their construction was somewhat different to that of the Egyptians.

Following their expulsion from Egypt, the Kushite capital was moved from Napata southward to Meroë near Shandī. The subsequent history of Kush, however, is one of gradual decline, ending with the kingdom's final fall coming in 350 CE when the king of Aksum moved down from the Ethiopian highlands and destroyed Meroë before plundering the towns along the Nile. The once mighty Kingdom of Kush was no more.



The Meroë pyramids

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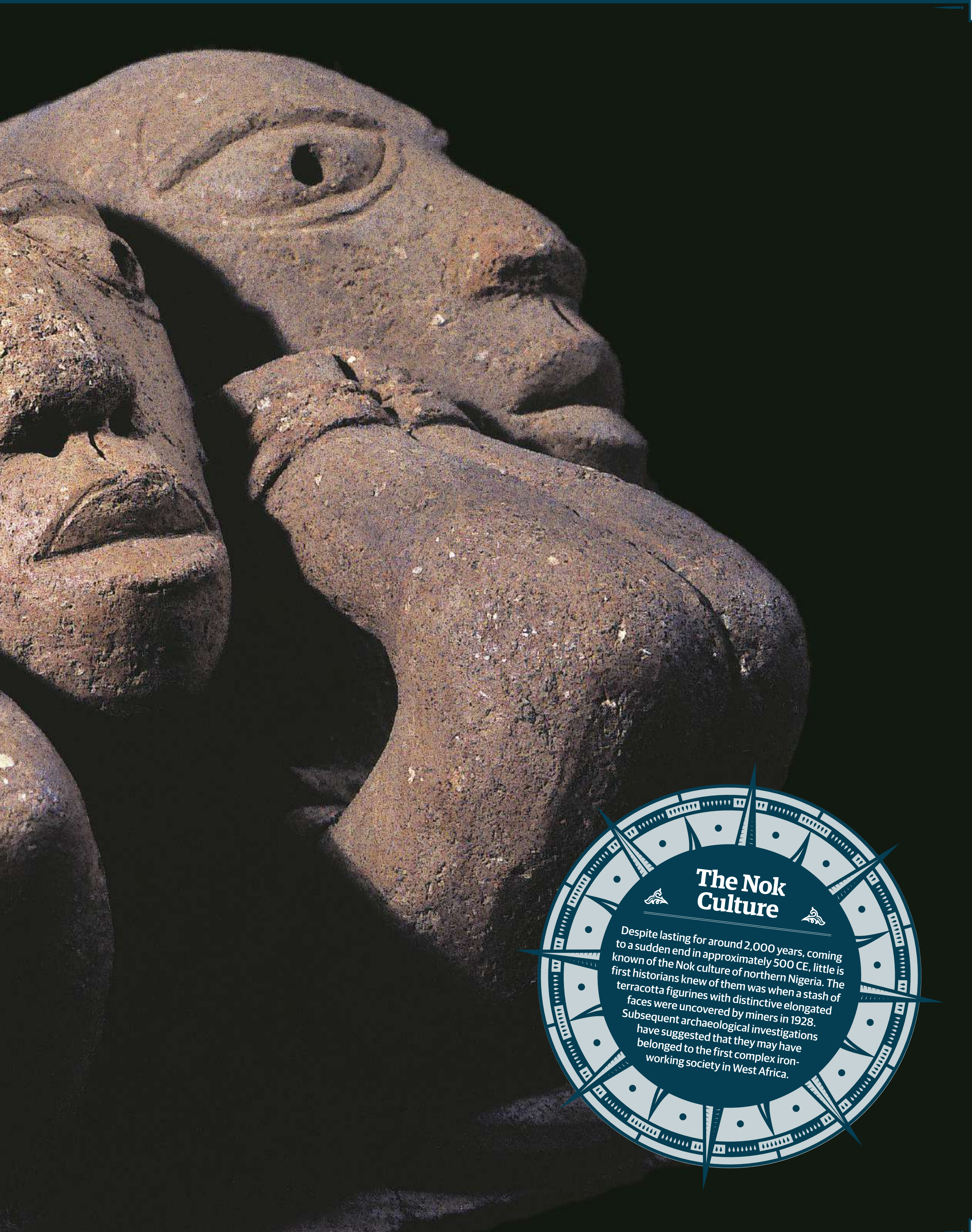

The Nok Culture

Despite lasting for around 2,000 years, coming to a sudden end in approximately 500 CE, little is known of the Nok culture of northern Nigeria. The first historians knew of them was when a stash of terracotta figurines with distinctive elongated faces were uncovered by miners in 1928. Subsequent archaeological investigations have suggested that they may have belonged to the first complex iron-working society in West Africa.

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The largest Aksumite obelisk measured 33 metres (108 feet), created from a single piece of granite, one of the largest monoliths of the ancient world

“The Aksumites became the first sub-Saharan kingdom to mint its own coins”

Among Aksum's more curious legacies were the enormous granite obelisks, built to mark notable tombs

THE KINGDOM OF AKSUM

Uniquely situated between the Western and Asiatic worlds, the sub-Saharan kingdom of Aksum grew into the most powerful state between the Roman Empire and Persia

• Written by Hareth Al Bustani •

In the 1st millennium BCE, sub-Saharan Africa was in a state of great migration. The east was transformed as Arabs crossed over the Red Sea, settling down with Kushite farmers, bringing with them the Semitic script. They established trading settlements along the Horn of Africa, buying ivory and shipping it across to Persia and further east via the Indian Ocean – bringing back textiles, spices and silk.

The city of Aksum was founded in the 1st century CE in the northern highlands of modern Ethiopia. With two annual rainy seasons, this fertile land soon drew scores of settlers from the south to rear cattle and farm. Cereal grew on the hillsides for up to nine months of the year, and the uniquely nutritious Ethiopian grain, teff, flourished even in the absence of rain. Its forests were rich in timber, used to produce charcoal, and the Aksumites terraced hilltops, dug canals, and built dams and cisterns. Shortly after its foundation, a visiting Greek described the city as a "metropolis" – the first recorded use of the word.

> Aksum was described by a contemporary Persian writer as one of the four greatest powers in the world at the time

According to local oral tradition, the indigenous inhabitants of the region were the Nilo-Saharan-speaking Kunama, who lived in Aksum alongside Semites before being expelled west. The name 'Aksum' probably derives from the Kunama words 'aya' and 'gusma', meaning 'hill' and 'climb'. As the city grew, it developed a civilisation of its own, with an outward-looking perspective.

Though the port of Adulis on the Red Sea coast of modern Eritrea was a 12-day journey away, the Aksumites grew wealthy trading with the Roman Empire, South Arabia, India, Sri Lanka and even China. Naturally the polity began to dominate its neighbours, expanding its political sphere as far as the Red Sea, where it acted as gatekeeper for luxury goods coming in and out of Africa. By the middle of the 2nd century, Aksum was described by a Greek geographer as the seat of a king's palace.

Having taken Egypt around the same time as Aksum was born, the Roman Empire became a natural trading partner. The Red Sea was the only source capable of meeting Rome's demand for incense, spice, ivory, cinnamon, pepper, cotton cloth, iron and steel. Pliny the Younger also mentioned the trade of slaves, hippopotamus hides and apes. During the 3rd century, as Roman power waned, the East African and Indian Ocean trade routes were controlled by the Arabs and Persians – with the Aksumites dominating their side of the Red Sea coast down to Cape Guardafui.

To commemorate its rising status, Aksum became the first sub-Saharan kingdom to mint its own coins, in gold, silver and bronze. Early coinage was adorned with crescents and discs, perhaps inspired by the civilisation's South Arabian roots. Gold coins were minted to Roman weight standards, and adorned with Greek – specifically for international trading purposes. Silver and copper coins, on the other hand, were decorated with the Semitic Ge'ez script. At this time, a Persian religious leader referred to Aksum as one of the world's four great empires.

The Aksumites projected this prestige through monumental obelisks, built to mark the royal necropolis. Their carved designs resembled multi-storey buildings, a fitting tribute to the royals, who lived their lives in three-storey stone palaces. Almost 120 of these adorn the royal graveyard – looming over stone tombs – complete with false doors and horseshoe brick arches. The largest of the obelisks towered some 33 metres high, carved from a single 550-ton block of granite. One of the ancient world's largest monolithic structures, it was carried four kilometres to its site, perhaps with the help of elephants.

At its peak, the city spanned 75 hectares, and was a thriving centre complete with industrial zones, palaces and two-story residential buildings. Palaces boasted stone walls lined with lime or mud, and reinforced with dressed beams. Central pavilions featured paintings and columns, surrounded by courtyards and smaller buildings. Meanwhile, commoners lived in mud houses with thatched roofs.

With no fortified walls, a ceremonial entrance marked the eastern gate, leading to a central

> “The Aksumites mastered the arts of basic smelting and forging”

temple, with a residential area to the west and a royal cemetery to the north and east. The whole city was surrounded by minor cemeteries and suburbs. Roughly 20,000 people called it home, with the king at the top of a hierarchical society, followed by nobles, priests and then the common craftsmen and farmers.

Traditional Aksumite pottery was handmade and poorly fired, but slipped and finely burnished. Wheel-thrown vessels were imported from the Mediterranean, Arabian Gulf and Nile Valley rather than produced at home. Locals did their best to replicate foreign goods, such as glassware, using parts of broken imports. They also crafted standardised flaked stone tools, used to process raw materials from ivory to hides. The Aksumites mastered the arts of basic smelting and forging, crafting an array of specialist metal tools used to produce ivory artefacts, often adorned with intertwined vines and animals with distinctive features.

Pieces such as the Venus of Aksum, found in a 3rd-century elite grave, hint at an upper-class appreciation of Graeco-Roman aesthetics. Ivory was immensely popular across the Roman Empire, Arabia, India and China, and with the North African elephant on the brink of extinction, Aksum was well-positioned to capitalise on its own abundant elephant population – with herds of reportedly up to 5,000. However, this pushed it into an economic war with its northwestern neighbour, the kingdom of Kush.

Aksum reached its peak in the 4th century under the reign of King Ezana who defeated the desert tribe of Beja, deporting them to distant lands. He went on to conquer Yemen before taking down the Kushite capital of Meroë where, in his own words: “I carried war against them when they had rebelled… I burnt their towns of stone and their towns of straw. At the same time my men plundered their grain, their bronze, their iron and their copper, destroyed the idols in their homes, their stocks of corn and of cotton; and they threw themselves into the river.” His kingdom became an empire, with a dozen cities stretching from the Nile valley to the Yemeni highlands.

Long inscriptions written in Greek and Semitic celebrated his conquests at great length, as well as his bold decision to depart from Aksum’s traditional religion. Early Aksumites practised an indigenous, monotheistic faith, worshipping the god Mahrem, from whom their kings were descended. Animism and ancestor-worship also played a role in spirituality, with sacrifices such as a dozen oxen offered to their spirits alongside Mahrem and Ares, his equivalent, the Greek god of war.

However, in around 330 Ezana was baptised by the Syrian monk Frumentius of Tyre. Aksum became one of the earliest Christian states, converting just five years after Constantine made it Rome’s official religion at the Council of Nicaea. Christianity quickly took root among royals and traders before funnelling down to the commoners. The state later sent missionaries to the neighbouring Kingdom of Alwa.

> Orthodox Christianity was fully embraced by Aksum in the 4th century CE by King Ezana

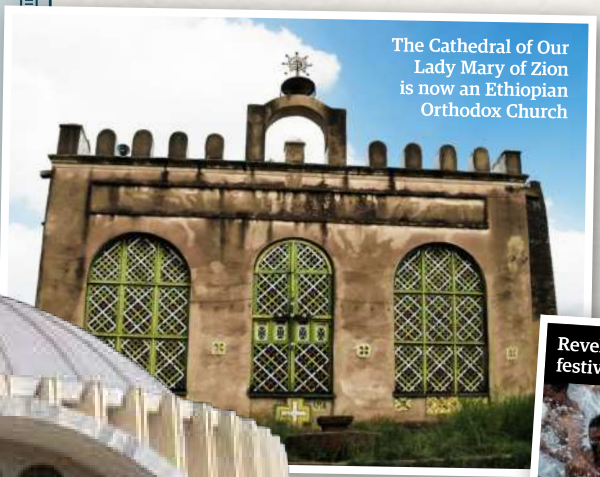
The Cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion

With the adoption of Christianity, church construction got underway – but one of the new buildings quickly became steeped in myth and legend

Among the churches built after King Ezana’s adoption of the Christian faith was Aksum’s own Cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion, a rectangular basilica built upon a stepped podium. Facing the church is a set of granite thrones, symbolising either 12 Aksumite judges, or the Nine Saints and some Christian kings. The Patriarch of Alexandria elected an Egyptian Copt as the Archbishop of the Ethiopian Church, a tradition that has continued to this day. Rebuilt as a crenellated Gondarine-style building in the 17th century, it hosts a sacred room, with doors depicting angels with swords, said to hold the Ark of the Covenant – the fabled chest believed to contain the original tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

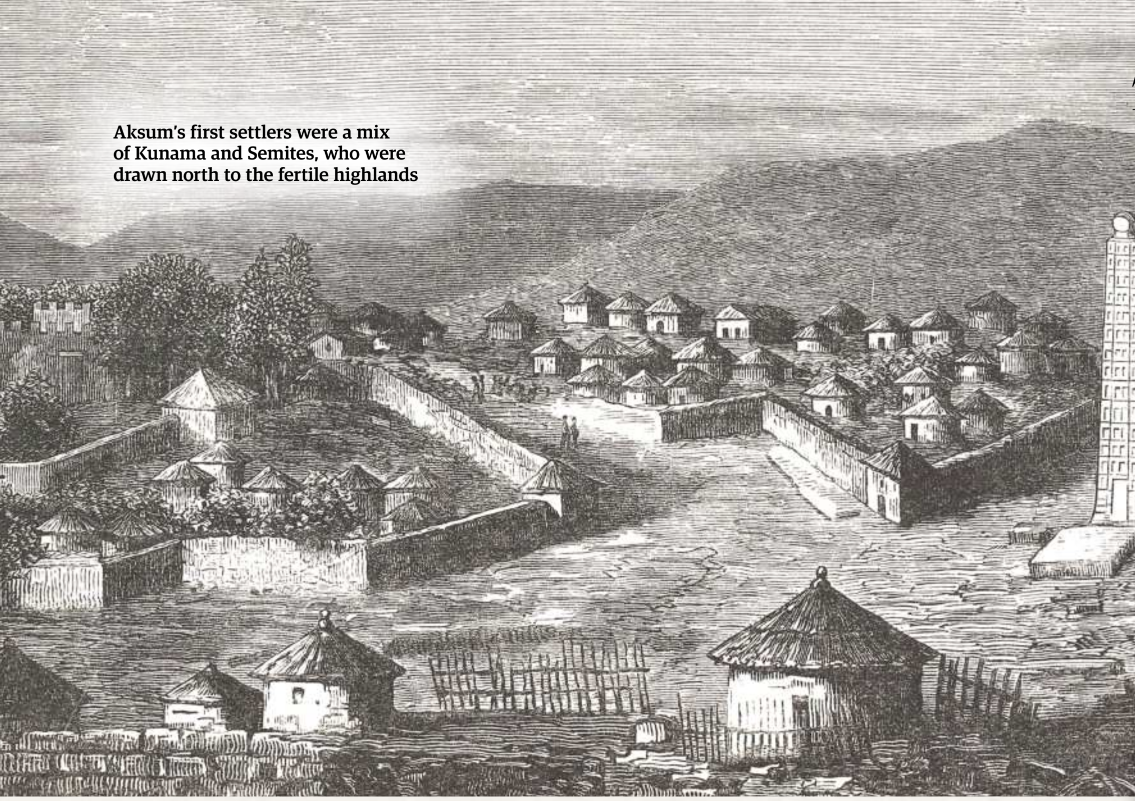
Ethiopian legend claims the Ark was brought there by Menelik – the lovechild of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who formed the country’s Solomonic dynasty. Today it is watched over by a guardian monk – appointed for life. During the annual festival of Timkat, celebrating Christ’s baptism, Ethiopian priests parade replicas of the Ark. Aksum remains a pilgrimage site, with worshippers travelling to a body of water known as Sheba’s Bath, where the Queen was said to bathe.

First constructed in the 4th century CE, the church has been rebuilt several times since then

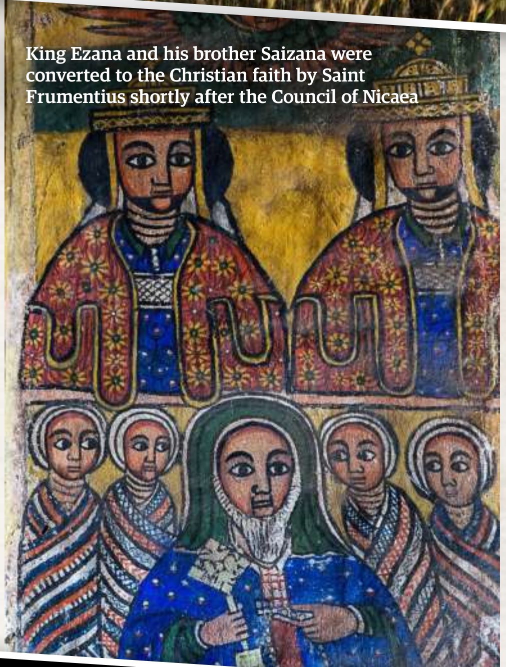


The Cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion is now an Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Revellers celebrate the annual Timkat festival, commemorating Christ’s baptism


Aksum's first settlers were a mix of Kunama and Semites, who were drawn north to the fertile highlands

Aksum's farmers made the most of their fertile land, utilising terraced farming to grow wheat and the endemic grain, teff


King Ezana and his brother Saizana were converted to the Christian faith by Saint Frumentius shortly after the Council of Nicaea

© Alamy, Getty Images

The conversion led to a transformation of Aksumite coinage, pottery, burial traditions and architecture. Coins were now adorned with the Christian cross, along with the king's likeness, an image of the teff and the inscription: "May the country be satisfied." Others said "Joy and peace to the people" and "He conquers through Christ". Aksumite minters began replacing gold coins with copper ones, innovating gilding methods to decorate crowns and other symbols with gold leaf.

Aksum became the first sub-Saharan power to begin minting its own coins, depicting kings and, later, Christian imagery

In the 5th century, despite the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, the kingdom enjoyed a rapid development boom – attributed by later Ethiopians to the 'Nine Saints', who founded the churches and monasteries outside the kingdom's capital. Emboldened, the 6th-century king Kaleb sent an army to Yemen to liberate Christians from persecution. While this resulted in new territories and a closer bond with the Byzantine emperor Justin I, it had proved a costly enterprise, marking the start of the kingdom's steady decline. Things were only made worse by the trade disruptions caused by the Persian invasions of Yemen, Jerusalem and Alexandria.

With the arrival of Islam, the Aksumites and Muslims briefly enjoyed an amicable relationship – with an Aksumite king granting refuge to a group of Muslims during the First Hijra in around 615. However, as the religion flourished the Arabians took total control of the Red Sea and cut it off from the Mediterranean. Shortly after, the Aksumites were forced to move their capital eastwards, with Aksum itself surviving into the modern age as a religious and coronation site.

With the ensuing Arab destruction of Adulis, the Aksumites, whose entire economy was modelled on international trade, were strangled – confining them to their agricultural highlands, coinciding with a massive drop in rainfall. Before long the area was abandoned, decaying into a handful of villages and monasteries as power shifted southwards, where Aksumite aesthetics were reborn in the Medieval rock-hewn churches of Lalibela.

While Aksum began as a self-sufficient farming community, when it rapidly blossomed into a merchant kingdom its greatest source of strength became its greatest weakness. As a uniquely powerful sub-Saharan civilisation dependent upon the international status quo, perhaps its reach exceeded its grasp – like its greatest obelisk, which came tumbling down under its own weight, the foundation simply was not strong enough.

Aksum's first church, the Cathedral of Our Lady Mary of Zion, is home to a 1,000-year-old goat-skin bible, written in Ge'ez

Roman, Persian, Indian and Chinese demand for precious ivory transformed Aksum from a city to a kingdom

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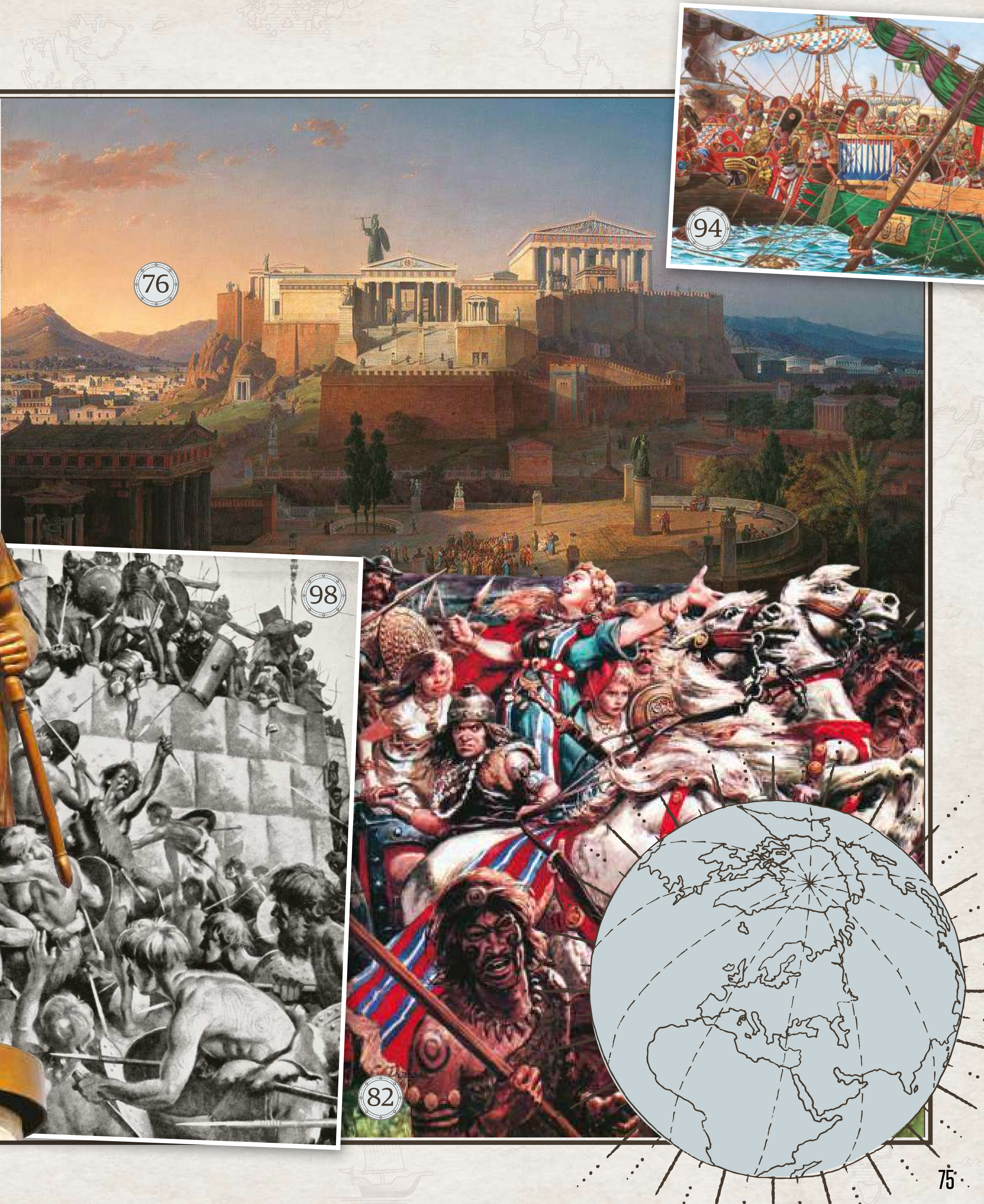
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EUROPE

THE GREEK CITY-STATES

From Athens to Thebes, uncover Ancient Greece's greatest cities and how they shaped the history of the Western world

The foundation of the glory that became Classical Greece was the city-state, or polis. However, although the city-state is most commonly associated with Greek civilisation, it is not unique to that society. Babylonia, Phoenicia, and other cultures developed the concept of the city-state as well, but in Ancient Greece, it was a phenomenon with origins in upheaval, migration, geography and other factors.

As the Bronze Age waned, Mycenaean Greece began its long descent to ultimate collapse. Named for the city of Mycenae, the Greece of the Trojan War endured for 500 years from 1600 to 1100 BCE, and both Athens and Sparta flourished at the height of Mycenaean power. However, the demise of Mycenaean civilisation is shrouded in mystery. Evidence suggests that there may have been internal strife, while some clues indicate that cities were put to the torch, destroyed and conquered by some outside power, possibly a Dorian invasion from the north. Written historical records of the period are scarce, perhaps perishing in the flames of the Mycenaean decline.

> The Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was built at the city-state of Ephesus

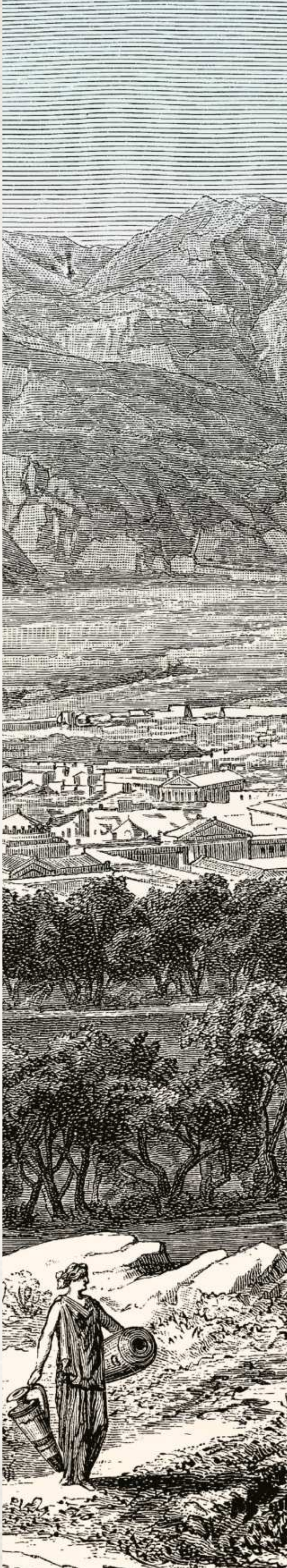
The fall of Mycenaean Greece precipitated a Dark Age – archaeologists have found little evidence of civilisation during the period that persisted for roughly 300 years, and no written record of the Dark Age has been discovered. Sometime during the 8th century BCE, however, it is believed that a substantial southward migration began. Greek peoples settled into agricultural communities. Cities were reoccupied and rebuilt. The Peloponnese and Attic peninsulas experienced population growth and established trade and commerce. Although the written form of the Mycenaean language had been lost, the Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet to their own speech, and finally a written record began to appear.

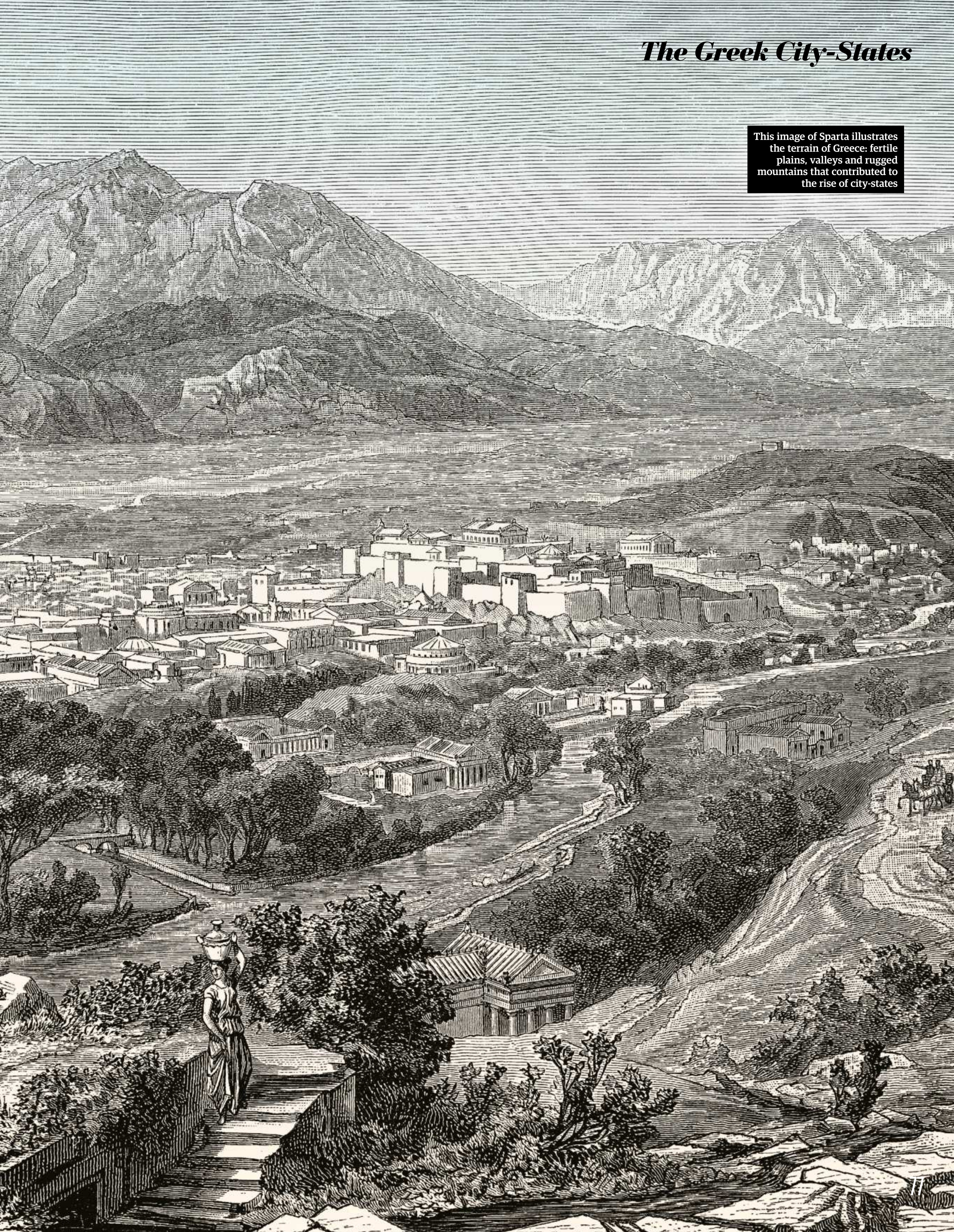
From around 800 to 480 BCE, the Archaic Period of Greek history, the city-state itself emerged and flourished, and though cultural and political differences may have developed among the early settlements, historians will generally agree that the geography of the region was the principle contributing factor in the flowering of these economic and social centres.

The geography of Greece consists of a rugged, mountainous interior punctuated by deep valleys and some areas with coastal plains that offer ready access to the Aegean, Ionian and Mediterranean seas. In addition, countless little islands cluster about the Attic and Peloponnese peninsulas.

The early city-states were agricultural settlements that took advantage of the fertile soil, and farmers cultivated the valleys and hillsides, initially on a subsistence basis but then thriving to the extent that they sought to trade their surplus crops for finished trade goods and other commodities. Those settlements that were in close proximity to the sea naturally developed maritime economies; fishing and merchant shipping stimulated trade, and eventually colonisation began.

The mountains, valleys, plains and seacoasts of Greece were formidable barriers to the concentration of large populations. Travel between the settlements was difficult at best, so separate communities began to evolve. While they may have shared common ancestry and language,





This image of Sparta illustrates the terrain of Greece: fertile plains, valleys and rugged mountains that contributed to the rise of city-states they were largely isolated from one another, and the catalyst of economic growth and prosperity hastened their independent maturity. They fielded armies and sometimes built fortifications and walls for protection against outsiders.

City building

These communities became known as poleis, and each one developed its own sense of legal, social, economic, political and cultural dynamics. As populations grew, the settlements expanded to include a fortified citadel, typically located on high ground and known as an acropolis, which would include one or more temples built in homage to a patron god and other deities. If the acropolis was not located in the centre of the city, it was usually nearby, built on a prominent hill or geographic feature so that it could still dominate the surrounding area.

During the late 8th century, the agora, a public gathering space and marketplace, became a focus of daily life, including commerce and civil discourse. Gradually, as the city became the seat of government, urban population growth occurred and the influence of the polis expanded with the administration of surrounding territory, known as the chora, outside the city proper. The city-states developed distinct forms of government, wrote their own laws, and by the late 6th century BCE, they had issued their own coinage and begun collecting taxes.

At the height of the proliferation of city-states, more than 1,000 poleis had been founded in Greece and across the Mediterranean and the coast of Asia Minor. By the middle of the 7th century BCE, population growth and economic prosperity had spurred a great wave of colonisation throughout the region, and this tremendous expansion of Greek culture lasted for more than 250 years.

> As the mythical birthplace of Greek deities Apollo and Artemis, Delos held a sacred position among the city-states

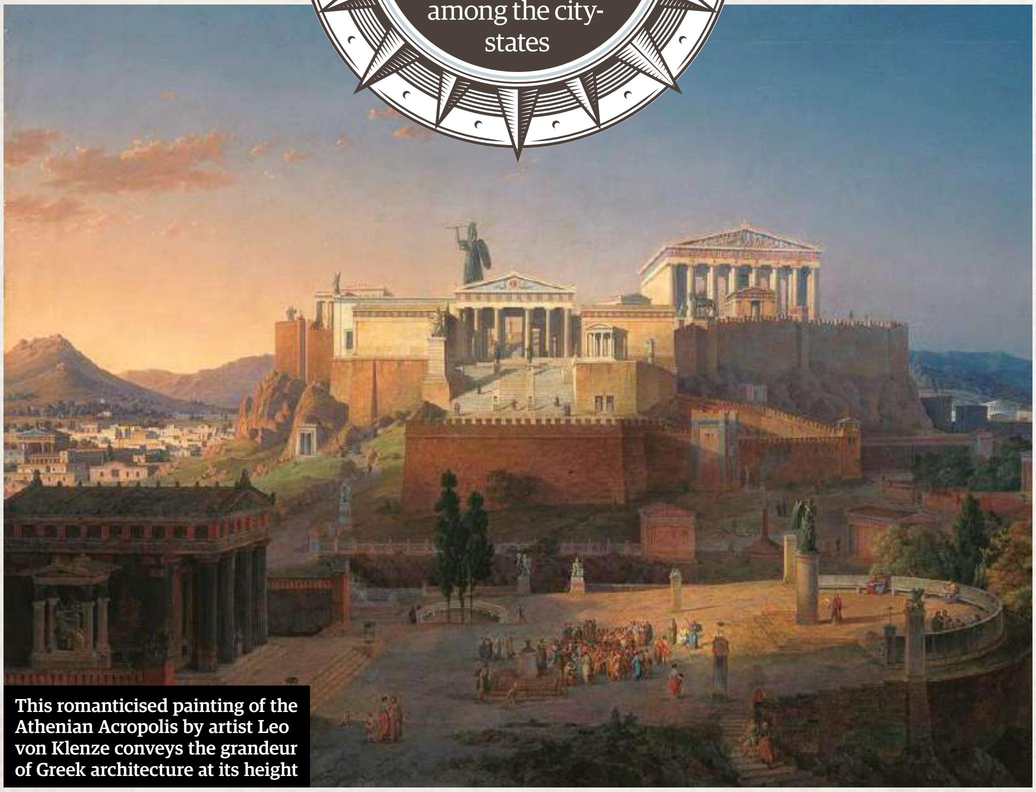
Principal among the city-states were Athens, Sparta, Rhodes, Syracuse, Corinth, Thebes, Argos, Elis and Eritrea. Sparta, which is said to have encompassed 8,500 kilometres, was by far the largest in terms of land. In contrast, Athens was the largest in terms of population, boasting roughly 200,000 inhabitants by the late 5th century BCE. The populations of other prominent city-states such as Argos and Corinth are believed to have peaked at 15,000 and 10,000 respectively. Sparta's population was estimated to be even fewer.

While the exportation of the Greek peoples and their culture contributed to the establishment of colonies, these settlements matured in their own right, maintaining trade and religious similarities with their parent cities but forming their own political identities and exercising autonomy.

Power and politics

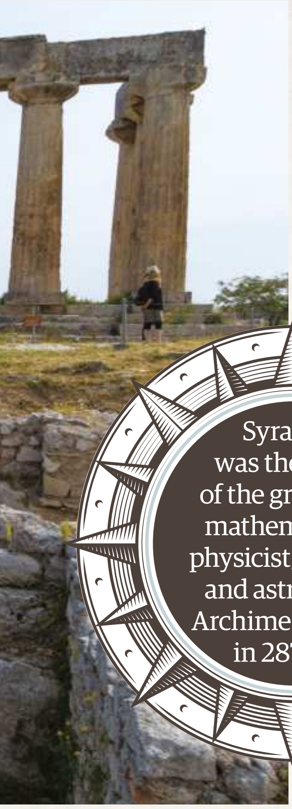
The early Greek city-states were governed by monarchs, representative of a small class of aristocratic landowners who had amassed significant wealth. Most of the city-states were small, some of them barely worthy of recognition as anything more than a village, and therefore, the use of the terms 'king' or 'queen' to describe these early rulers is somewhat inaccurate. The aristocracy generally opposed the rule of any monarch in a permanent sense, while also staunchly defending the political independence of their particular cities.

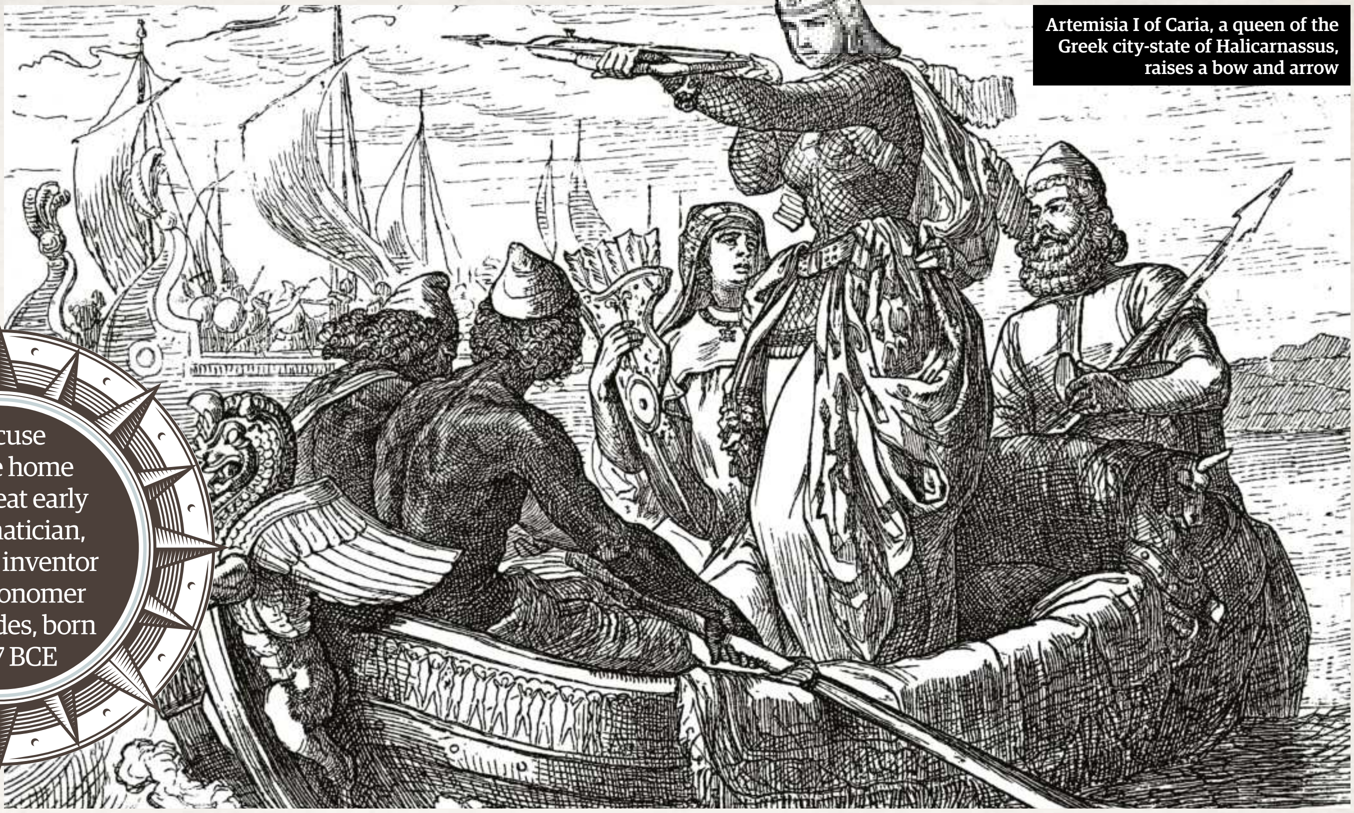
The ruins of the Temple of Apollo at Corinth bear mute testimony to the city-state's former grandeur


This romanticised painting of the Athenian Acropolis by artist Leo von Klenze conveys the grandeur of Greek architecture at its height

However, the continuing definition of social classes threatened the power of the aristocracy by the mid-6th century. The emergence of the merchant class broadened social contrasts and distinctions, particularly in the larger city-states, and gave rise to even greater discourse and class struggle. In numerous cases, as the aristocracy became increasingly unpopular, its rulers were supplanted by strongmen known as 'tyrants', who rose to power - often from the fringe of society - with the support of the people. The term 'tyrant' itself did not originally convey the negative connotation that is associated with it today - originally they were indeed authoritarian, but no reference was made to cruelty or self-serving administration. While many of them ruled only a short time and the historical record relates that they were deposed, banished, assassinated or even stoned to death, there were notable exceptions.

Cypselus led Corinth for 30 years and encouraged the city's colonisation of northwestern Greece. Modern historians view him as a demagogue, but he is believed to have been so popular that he did not require a bodyguard and moved freely among the people. He was succeeded by his son Periander, who ruled Corinth for 40 years. Assessments of Periander's rule vary. Although some contemporary accounts portrayed him as a cruel dictator, others assert that he was just and equitable. Historians do remember him as one of the Seven Sages of Greece, prominent





Artemisia I of Caria, a queen of the Greek city-state of Halicarnassus, raises a bow and arrow

Syracuse was the home of the great early mathematician, physicist, inventor and astronomer Archimedes, born in 287 BCE

individuals who lived in the 6th century BCE and were known far and wide for their wisdom. Regardless, after Periander's death around 587 BCE, the Corinthian tyranny also faded away.

During the course of 200 years, the meaning of the word 'tyrant' did evolve to its present understanding. It should be noted, though, that the tyrants served as a bridge from authoritarian aristocratic rule to the more democratic forms of government that eventually emerged among the city-states.

Spartan stand

Sparta was a notable exception to the rule of the tyrants. Ancient Greek historians relate that the oracle of the sun god Apollo at Delphi guided the statesman and military commander Lycurgus to shape Spartan society on the pillars of three virtues: equality among the citizens of Sparta, military prowess and austerity. Lycurgus is remembered as the legendary lawgiver of Sparta, and the constitution, sometimes referred to as the Great Rhetra, adopted by the city-state around 650 BCE preserved the power of the aristocracy, protected the rule of the two royal houses of Sparta, and initiated the societal structure that built the militaristic culture for which the city-state has earned enduring fame. Spartan society put a great emphasis on loyalty to the city-state and service in the military, and Lycurgus is seen as the chief sponsor of its development.

The social classes in the city-state included the Spartans, also known as Spartiates, who were full citizens; helots, who were serfs or slave labourers; and perioeci - meaning 'dwellers around' - who were craftsmen and merchants, sitting in the middle of the social hierarchy as they were neither full citizens nor slaves.

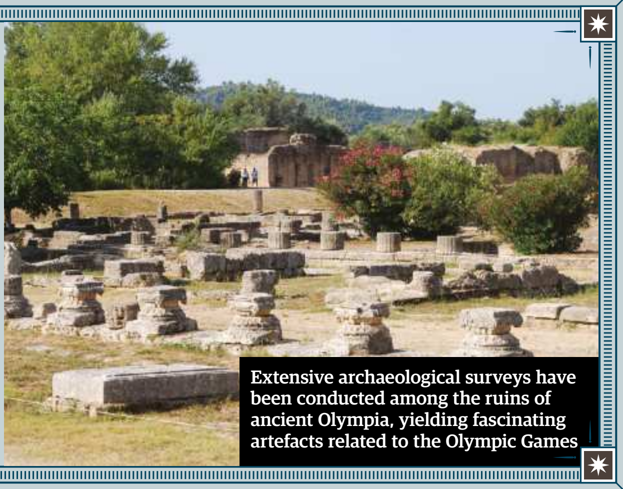
Military service was compulsory in Sparta, and all male citizens were required to participate, essentially throughout their lives. At the age of seven, young boys were removed from their homes and entered the Agoge, a state-run system of education, physical training and military indoctrination. Men under 30 years of age, even those who were married, were required to live in communal military barracks away from their wives and to eat meals at communal tables.

Spartan women, perhaps due in part to the commitment of males to the military, were well educated and generally enjoyed greater freedom than women of other Greek city-states. They engaged in sporting competitions, received formal schooling and were allowed to own property.

The Olympic Games

The first Olympic games took place in the cluster of gathering spaces, temples and buildings at the sanctuary of Olympia in 776 BCE. Organised by leaders of the city-state of Elis, the games originated as a religious and athletic celebration that was to occur every four years, and during the peace or truce that was observed during the Olympics all disputes and armed conflict between rivals or warring city-states were suspended. The games included athletic competition and combat demonstrations, such as wrestling, chariot racing, distance running, and throwing the discus and javelin.

Although the actual origins of the Olympic Games remain somewhat mysterious, it is believed that the events promoted some measure of goodwill and cooperation among the city-states. Sacrifices to the gods were common, particularly to Zeus, whose great temple at Olympia was said to have housed a huge statue of the god, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, wrought from ivory and gold by the sculptor Phidias around 435 BCE. The Temple of Zeus, the Temple of Hera, a tomb-like structure called the Pelopion and the altar on which sacrifices were performed stood within the temenos, or sacred enclosure, at Olympia.

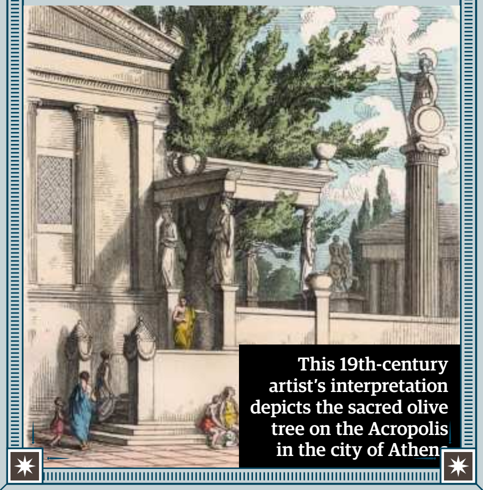


Extensive archaeological surveys have been conducted among the ruins of ancient Olympia, yielding fascinating artefacts related to the Olympic Games

The olive tree

The olive tree was such a driving force in the economies of the Ancient Greek city-states that it was believed to have been a gift of the gods – namely from Athena, the goddess of wisdom, from whom Athens took its name. The olive tree contributed to the prosperity of Greeks in many ways. Its wood was used in the construction of homes and ships. Its fruit was a staple of the Greek diet. Its oil served as fuel for lamps and was thought to have medicinal value. Its leaves were used to form the crowns worn by victorious athletes. Perhaps most significantly, its abundance allowed the export of its products to generate tremendous wealth for the city-states.

The origin of the olive tree was said to have been in a contest proposed by Zeus between Athena and Poseidon, god of the sea, to bestow a gift upon the people. Poseidon produced a salt spring by striking his trident on nearby rocks, and Athena brought forth the olive tree, its branches swaying in the breeze and full of ripening fruit. The early Athenians were allowed to choose one of these gifts, and they selected the olive tree. Today, an olive tree grows on the Athenian Acropolis in remembrance of the myth.



This 19th-century artist's interpretation depicts the sacred olive tree on the Acropolis in the city of Athen

Areopagus Hill was the site of meetings held by a group of Athenian noblemen, which eventually assumed its name

Athens ascendant

The Athenian king, or basileus, ruled as early as the 9th century BCE with a group of influential nobles at court. By 683 BCE, though, the monarchy had been abolished, primarily through the action of the very nobles with which the king had been surrounded. The Athenian nobility amassed sizeable wealth and increasing political influence as their agricultural products were exported around the region.

Argos, one of the earliest of the Greek city-states, was founded during the Mycenaean period

As their wealth grew, Athenian noblemen began to gather to discuss political issues of the day. This gathering was called the 'Areopagus,' named for the prominent hill on which the men gathered. Rather than vesting most of the power in the hands of a single monarch, the Areopagus favoured government by a group of nine noblemen that were elected by their body. By the 8th century, an oligarchy had emerged from the deliberations of the Areopagus. Known as archons, these chosen were empowered to make decisions affecting the lives of every Athenian; however, their power was held in check by the requirement that all decisions had to be submitted to the entire Areopagus and approved first.

The oligarchy and Areopagus are evidence of the early stirrings of Athenian democracy, but there were still significant class distinctions in the city-state, and the distribution of wealth was quite limited. Economic issues began to surface as subsistence farmers depleted the soil and were unable to produce crops that would sustain their families. In order to survive, they sold themselves and their families into servitude – essentially slavery. While the average farming family in Athens was suffering, the aristocratic class only continued to prosper.

When economic disparity boiled over into civil unrest in the mid 7th century BCE, the oligarchy fell out of favour with the people. In its place rose a succession of so-called tyrants, who took control of the Athenian government with the support of the common people. Most prominent among these tyrants was Solon, who came to power in 594 BCE. Solon established an aristocratic form of government that was loosely based on a constitution. He enacted sweeping reforms and is remembered to this day as the foremost proponent of redress for the lower classes of Athenians and as a lawgiver. Solon organised Athenian society into four distinct classes, or tribes, based upon their wealth, and established a representative body called the Council of 400, with 100 members of each tribe. The poorest social class was further represented by an assembly known as the Ecclesia of Demos.

The military strongman Peisistratus gained control in Athens in 560 BCE and ruled for the next half-century. Although he maintained his tight grip on power through the presence of a loyal army, Peisistratus enacted measures to benefit Athens' subsistence farmers and to improve the infrastructure of the growing city-state, while substantially diminishing the power of the aristocratic class.

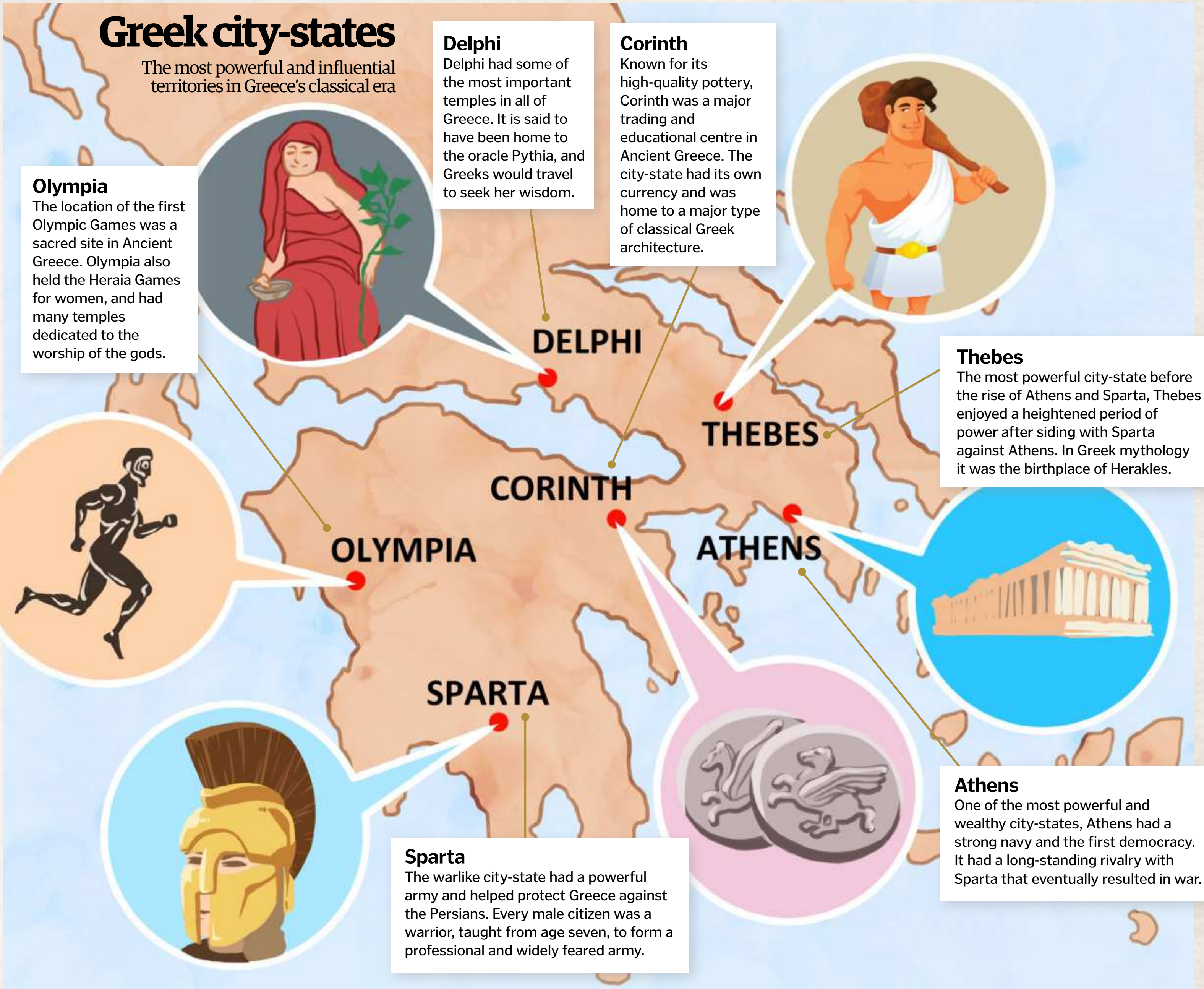
Under Cleisthenes, whose brief rule lasted only six years from 508 to 502 BCE, all free men living in Athens and the surrounding Attic Peninsula were granted citizenship, meaning that they were allowed to participate in the Athenian political process. The seeds of democracy had begun to take root in Athenian soil.

City-states proliferate

Athens and Sparta were not the only influential city-states – Corinth was reputed as a centre of decadent living, but also as a hub of trade and commerce. Located on an isthmus that offered access to both the Aegean and Ionian Seas and controlling access to the Peloponnese, Corinth was a prominent naval power that continually opposed Athenian influence and came to play a key role in the development of Greek culture.

Thebes was also a powerful economic and military force during the era of the city-states and a principal adversary of Athens. The Theban army actually sided with Xerxes during the Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BCE. Rhodes was a maritime city-state that actually encompassed an entire island in the eastern Mediterranean. Its location astride busy trade routes allowed merchants to amass significant wealth.

The expansion of Greek culture and settlement gave rise to numerous city-states along the coast of Asia Minor and westward to Sicily, the Italian



Greek city-states

The most powerful and influential territories in Greece's classical era

Olympia
The location of the first Olympic Games was a sacred site in Ancient Greece. Olympia also held the Heraia Games for women, and had many temples dedicated to the worship of the gods.

Delphi
Delphi had some of the most important temples in all of Greece. It is said to have been home to the oracle Pythia, and Greeks would travel to seek her wisdom.

Corinth
Known for its high-quality pottery, Corinth was a major trading and educational centre in Ancient Greece. The city-state had its own currency and was home to a major type of classical Greek architecture.

Thebes
The most powerful city-state before the rise of Athens and Sparta, Thebes enjoyed a heightened period of power after siding with Sparta against Athens. In Greek mythology it was the birthplace of Herakles.

Athens
One of the most powerful and wealthy city-states, Athens had a strong navy and the first democracy. It had a long-standing rivalry with Sparta that eventually resulted in war.

Sparta
The warlike city-state had a powerful army and helped protect Greece against the Persians. Every male citizen was a warrior, taught from age seven, to form a professional and widely feared army.

mainland and the coast of North Africa. In the late 8th century BCE, settlers from the area of Corinth founded Syracuse, which became the largest city in Sicily and waged war with the kingdom of Carthage for control of the island. In turn, Syracuse also established colonies along the coast of the Adriatic Sea. Around 600 BCE, adventurers from Phocaea, a city-state located on the coast of modern Turkey, sailed westward and founded the settlement of Massalia, which then developed into a bustling western Mediterranean seaport and became modern Marseilles in France.

Competition and cooperation

The early rivalries that emerged among the Greek city-states emanated from the desire to control surrounding lands. The aristocratic ruling classes often disagreed, and at times these conflicts erupted into open warfare. In fact, at any given time in their turbulent history, two or more of the city-states were at war with one another. Inevitably, as the territories of the city-states expanded, disputes over land and the definition of borders arose. Further, access to the sea and the exploitation of valuable resources such as timber, silver, and other commodities fuelled the rivalries between them.

Although most of the city-states banded together to defeat the Persian invasion of 480 BCE, the response to such an external threat merely postponed the coming of the catastrophic Peloponnesian War decades later. In the wake of the defeat of the Persians, Athens, with its unsurpassed naval supremacy, dominated the other city-states. The Athenians assembled the Delian League and in time transformed the alliance into something that resembled a protectorate or empire rather than a cooperative gathering of equal city-states. Corinth remained a staunch rival of Athens, and by 431 BCE the leaders of Sparta had come to recognise the threat posed by Athenian domination.

The ruinous Peloponnesian War between Athens and the Delian League and the Spartan-led Peloponnesian League left Athens vanquished and Sparta preeminent but too weak to effectively assert control. In time, Thebes defeated Sparta and dominated Greek affairs for a brief period. Internal strife and armed conflict weakened the city-states and hastened their conquest by the Macedonian army of King Philip II, who defeated their alliance at Chaeronea in 338 BCE.

The development of the Greek city-states served as a catalyst for the expansion of Greek culture and influence across much of the known world. While their common heritage contributed to the collective realisation that all were 'Greek,' the city-states remained fiercely independent and in significant aspects of their societies, quite diverse.

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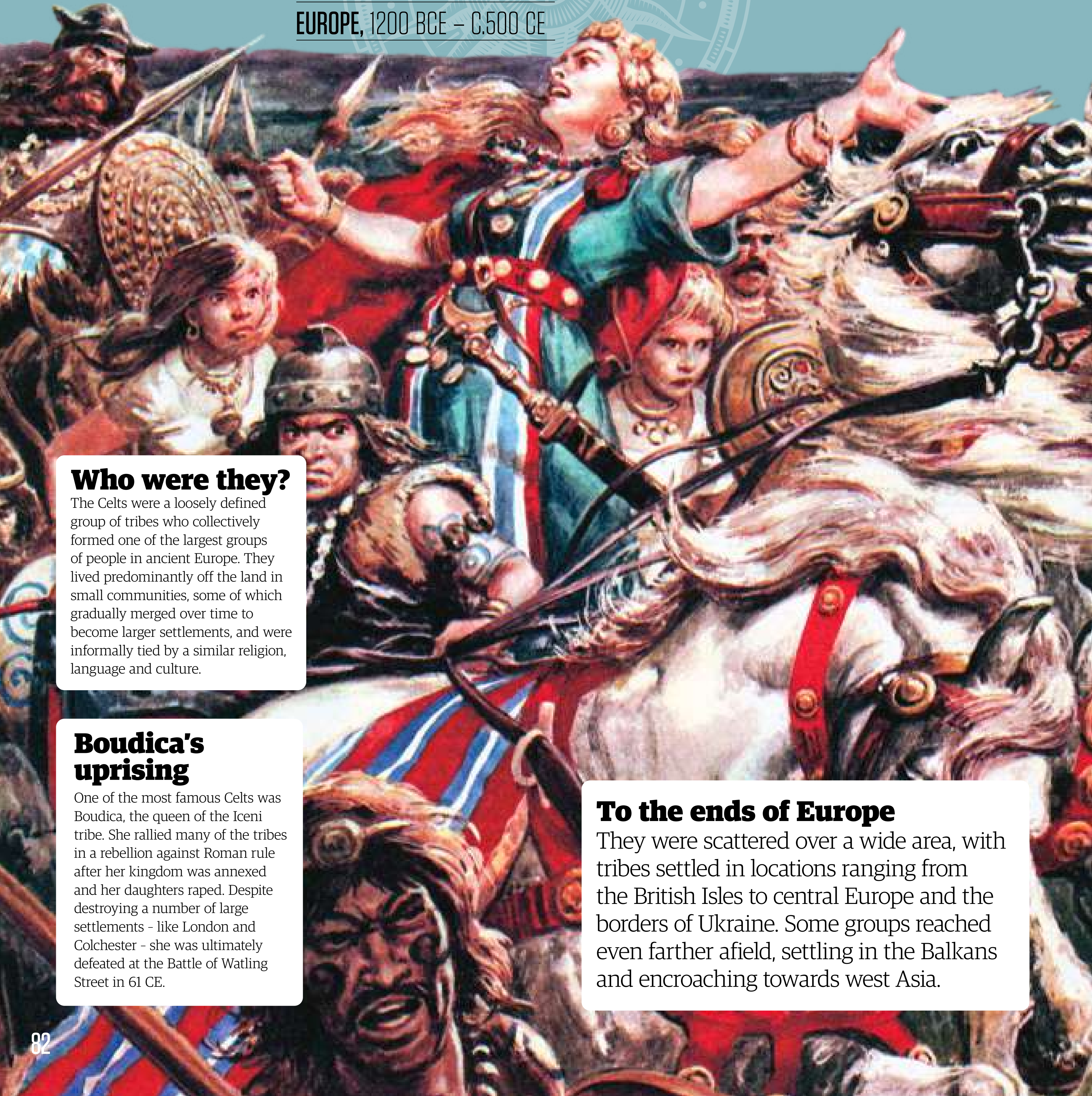
THE CELTS

EUROPE, 1200 BCE – C.500 CE



Who were they?

The Celts were a loosely defined group of tribes who collectively formed one of the largest groups of people in ancient Europe. They lived predominantly off the land in small communities, some of which gradually merged over time to become larger settlements, and were informally tied by a similar religion, language and culture.

Boudica's uprising

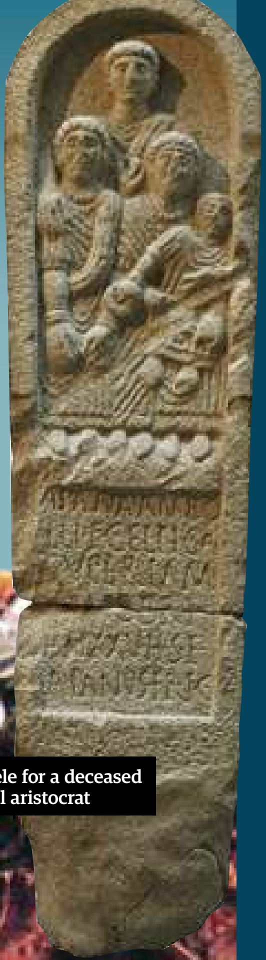
One of the most famous Celts was Boudica, the queen of the Iceni tribe. She rallied many of the tribes in a rebellion against Roman rule after her kingdom was annexed and her daughters raped. Despite destroying a number of large settlements - like London and Colchester - she was ultimately defeated at the Battle of Watling Street in 61 CE.

To the ends of Europe

They were scattered over a wide area, with tribes settled in locations ranging from the British Isles to central Europe and the borders of Ukraine. Some groups reached even farther afield, settling in the Balkans and encroaching towards west Asia.

Ancient origins

The earliest archaeological evidence of the Celts' existence dates back to around 1200 BCE, although what we would refer to as the Celtic civilisation was in existence by around 750 BCE. They began to migrate to Britain around 500 BCE, and although they never truly 'died out' - many either migrated or merged with the Roman populace.


A stele for a deceased tribal aristocrat

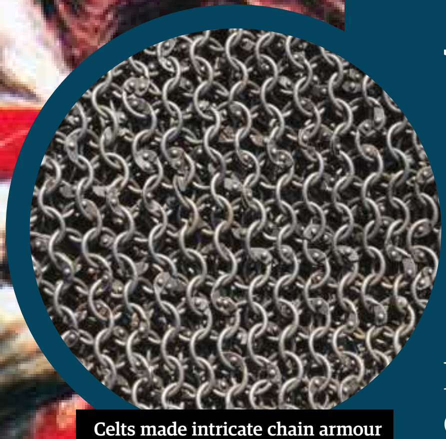
No mere barbarians

Myth portrays them as savages, but they possessed impressive reserves of knowledge. For instance, their calendars were more accurate than the Romans', proving they were capable of mathematical and scientific thought.

A reassembled calendar tablet found in Coligny

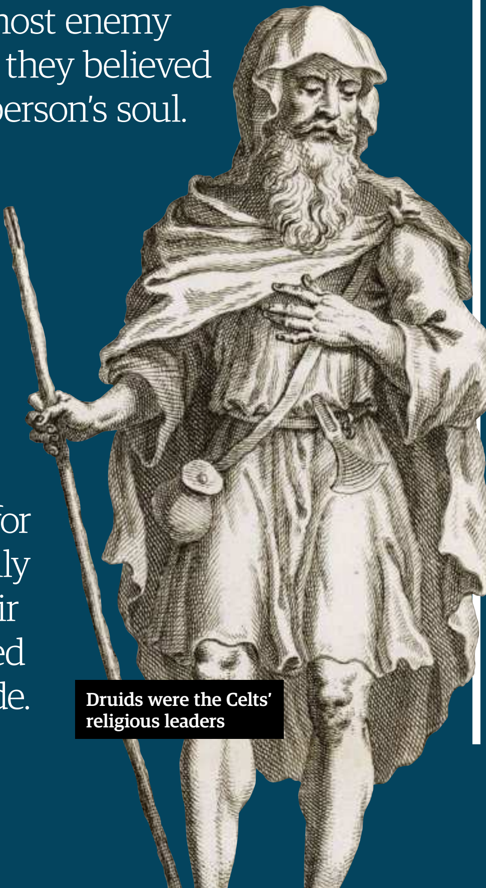
Warrior race

The Celts were ferocious warriors, with their people trained in battle from childhood. Their weapons were predominantly made of iron, and they prided themselves on who could collect the most enemy heads, which they believed contained a person's soul.


Celts made intricate chain armour

Druids

The Celts possessed a strong religious culture, with holy men called druids having a strong presence. They spent 20 years training for their position, gaining knowledge of Celtic customs, astronomy and philosophy, and often acted as advisers to their rulers and the general populace alike.


Druids were the Celts' religious leaders

Road builders

Although Romans generally take the credit for being master route planners, the Celts actually constructed a road system before them. Their paths were made out of wood, and connected the different settlements for purposes of trade.

Boudica led an army against Roman invaders

Key figures

Boudica

c.60 CE

The warrior queen of the Iceni tribe who led the uprising against the Romans in 61 CE.

Vercingetorix

82-46 BCE

The chief of the Gallic Arverni tribe, who united the Gauls against the Romans during the Gallic Wars.

Caratacus

10-50 CE

The chief of the Catuvellauni tribe evaded the Romans for years before being captured and ultimately pardoned.

Cassivellaunus

c.54 BCE

He led the defence against Julius Caesar's second expedition and military campaign in Britain in 54 BCE.

Commius

c.50 BCE

The king of a number of tribes at various points, he allied with Roman leader Julius Caesar before later rebelling.

Major events

Settling in Britain

500 BCE

Around this time, the first Celtic tribes started to settle in Britain, having gradually migrated from central Europe.

Sacking Rome

387 BCE

The Gallic Celts ransacked the city after defeating the Romans at the Battle of the Allia.

Romans in Britain

43 CE

After crossing the English Channel, Romans ultimately replaced the Celts as the ruling force in Britain.

Boudica's uprising

61 CE

Under her leadership, an estimated 70,000 to 80,000 Celts unsuccessfully rebelled against Roman rule.

Collapse of the Roman Empire

476 CE

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire, much of the remnants of the two civilisations would come to merge together.

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ANCIENT ROME

From its humble beginnings as a small kingdom of warring fiefdoms, to one of history's most imposing superpowers, Rome was a nation for the ages

Today, Rome is a beautiful tourist attraction more likely to play host to camera-toting travellers than barbarian hordes, but in the ages of the ancient world it was the epicentre of civilisation. The crown jewel of a nation that assumed every form – kingdom, republic and empire – a realm so powerful it changed the face of history forever. In the name of Rome and its ever-changing governments, it redefined the principles and engineering of warfare, revolutionised modern infrastructure and ushered in the beginning of the Middle Ages.

And like any great superpower, it carved its borders across the face of the world. From the cold shores of Britannia to the warm sands of Palestine and Egypt, Rome created for itself an empire that was a sight to behold, but one that invited attack at every juncture. The ancient world was not a pleasant place – full of plague, storms and warring tribes from every corner of the wild – but it was still a canvas upon which Rome instilled the principles of its own special form of civilisation.

It rose from humble beginnings, forming from the gens, or clans, of Italy, united under a new king with the ambitious vision for a greater state. It was from the fires of that origin that some of the most iconic Roman concepts were forged, not least of which were the very beginnings of the Senate; the democratic voice of the people that spent the next few eras battling the rulers that would come and go at Rome's helm.

As a kingdom, Rome began to fashion itself as a capital to be proud of; the pillars and grand designs of the Greeks and the Etruscans informing an architectural flair that would find itself in everything from municipal buildings to the roads it laid across the realm. The folly of kings soon led Rome to take a new form, forged for a new age: the Roman Republic. A shining beacon of democracy built on the back of a military the world had never seen before – organised, disciplined and hardened in the name of conflict and invasion. The legions of Rome became the hammer that conquered the known world, but they would also bring the nation to the brink of destruction in a crisis to follow.

Democracy brought Rome greatness, but also left it open to the schemes of powerful men and the actions of Julius Caesar transformed the nation into a new state, one focused on conquest anew: an empire, with an emperor at its highest seat of office and a desire to reshape in his image. As the Roman Empire, Rome became stronger than ever, but for all its innovations and advancements in engineering (many of which would be lost to the Dark Ages to come), Rome would attempt to rule a world that was changing rapidly. And so its fate would be sealed – one more great empire falling in place of another.

The Roman Empire technically only refers to a relatively short period in the history of Ancient Rome – it existed as a kingdom and a republic before that

THE ELEMENTS OF ANCIENT ROME

From religion and the arts to the use of slaves and infrastructure, Ancient Rome was a unique society that operated on its own terms

In many ways, Ancient Rome was well ahead of its time. Despite all of the ancient trappings, the great minds of Italy were always busy looking upwards and onwards. For the Senate and Rome's many revolving leaders, extending the borders of the realm was of paramount importance. Soldiers were the true currency of progress, and conquering new lands and absorbing their people was the fuel needed to power that machine. That cycle swelled Rome's legions and the state began expanding at a terrifying rate.

Alongside this expansion, the engineers of the time revolutionised the facilities of the age. Vast aqueducts brought running water to the people and freshly paved roads (curved to drain off rainwater, no less) linked the realm together much like a concrete nervous system. Upon these roads, Rome's trade flourished and its most precious commodity, the slaves, helped the Roman economy turn in much the same way as it would in other empires in the centuries to come.

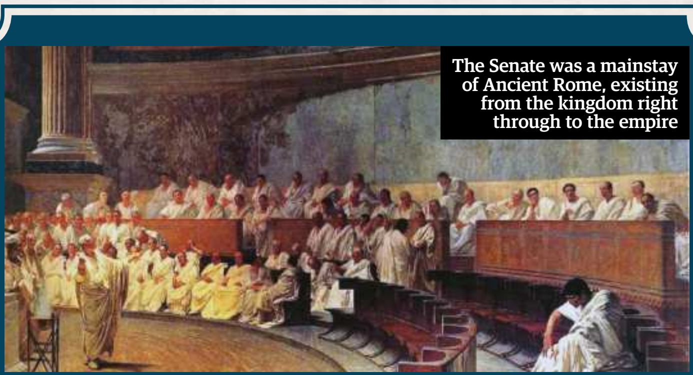
The slave trade segued into the hedonistic fabric of Roman society, fuelling a national love for bloodsports. The people adored their arts, enjoying everything from theatre to works of literature. It was a time of expression, where the real world mingled seamlessly with an almost tribalistic embrace of the gods and prayer.

> "Soldiers were the true currency of progress, and conquering new lands was the fuel needed to power that machine"

Religion

The Romans had a practical view of religion. It informed almost every facet of their lives not because they were particularly pious, but because superstitions and rituals were an everyday part of life. The Romans saw the work of the gods in everything they did, and the role of enacting those rituals fed back into society's patriarchal structure. It was the role of the head of the household to perform a day's rituals, making offerings to Jupiter or Saturn. The same idea applied to the military, with prayers made to Mars on the eve of battle.

Roman religion took many of its elements from external sources. Concepts from Greek practices and Etruscan myth became intertwined with Roman rituals, with prayer and sacrifice more of an inherent part of life than a religious element. Religion was even represented in government – the official oversight of rites to counteract bad omens and attract prosperity for a new emperor fell at the feet of the Pontifical College.



The Senate was a mainstay of Ancient Rome, existing from the kingdom right through to the empire

Government

Ancient Rome conjures images of men in white robes arguing the issues of the day in the Roman Forum, and emperors leading armies with one hand while holding off assassination attempts with the other. In reality, the Romans lived their lives under many different forms of government, but the Senate endured through them all. Formed in 753 BCE with the creation of the Roman Kingdom, the Senate was the product of a deeply patriarchal society. The oldest and wisest men from influential families oversaw the creation of laws, conduct trials and debate on behalf of the people.

Under the guise of the republic, the Roman dream of a true democratic governance flourished. The Senate rose to its highest level of power, and through its ranks rose plebeians (regular citizens). Following the rise of the triumvirate (where three men vied for power in government) and the eventual empire, Romans were in fealty to a single man yet again.

One of the greatest Roman achievements were its network of roads, some of which are still used today

Infrastructure

For the Romans, maintaining a solid infrastructure for the people was just as important as any military campaign. The city of Rome – the crowning jewel of the kingdom, the republic and the empire – was built as the example for the rest of the realm and the Roman government began constructing buildings out of elaborately carved stone, the artistic flair living large in the Roman architecture.

The Romans couldn't be expected to live a lavish lifestyle in their own filth, so they did what any self-respecting and enterprising nation would do – they built vast aqueducts that redirected underground sources of fresh water all the way back to Rome. These underground ceramic pipes and overground lanes (which often doubled as bridges) used nothing more than gravity to bring this life-giving resource into the capital.

And that's not to mention the breathtaking network of roads that was built to replace the dirt roads and simple lanes the Etruscans had built in the centuries before. With cement and broken stones, the Romans laid Rome at the heart of a vast network that even stretched as far as Britannia.

There were plenty of other amphitheatres and arenas around Rome, especially in the areas surrounding the city

Entertainment

The Romans liked to celebrate and often built arenas and amphitheatres. The Colosseum (sometimes known as the Flavian Amphitheatre) was built between 70 CE and 80 CE and proved to be Rome's grandest entertainment centre. It could seat around 50,000 spectators and even had a giant canvas canopy that could be erected above it should the baking Italian weather prove too much.

The Colosseum gives us an insight into gladiatorial combat. It was a national favourite, with everything from disgraced soldiers to well-muscled slaves eviscerating one another in the name of entertainment. Great battles were often re-enacted, with professional fighters brought in to ensure the history books were adhered to in the arena.

Chariot racing was another popular source of entertainment and its results could often turn just as bloody should a chariot crash. Violence was the means by which Rome had become a superpower, so it only seemed fitting its own people would gain an insatiable bloodlust when it came to how it kept itself entertained.

Military

To the Romans, the armies formed a vital part of its expansion and continued safety. A force so powerful it dominated the Western world for over 1,000 years, it's an example of organisation and discipline that remains one of history's most fearsome forces. The Roman armies believed themselves descended from Mars himself, the God of War, and they took that sense of immortality into battle and it made them a fearsome sight to behold.

The continued maintenance of a military permeated every aspect of Roman society. It informed the increasing *populus*, with women actively encouraged to have many children in order to increase the chance of producing boys. Young men were expected to join the armies and serve, while elders with any experience of leading men were expected to join the legions and do their duty in the name of Rome.

What set the Romans apart from the many barbarians they encountered was their ironclad sense of discipline. Soldiers were drilled constantly in everything from marching formations to shield walls and Roman generals inspected each element of warfare – camps, weapons and tactics were under constant inspection and it made the Roman war machine legendary.

Slaves could have families, but any children born to a slave woman would also become enslaved by proxy

Slavery

The ownership of slaves, which could be bought in marketplaces across Rome and throughout the realm, was a sign of status and power among the high-ranking families. Young boys or men often proved the most expensive because they could be put to so many different tasks. Slaves came mostly from conquered lands and with the military in a near-constant state of expansion during the republic and early empire, Rome was awash with a regular flow of souls.

The figures surrounding the number of slaves in Rome at any one given time remains sketchy, but it's believed that at the height of the empire slaves represented around 25 per cent of the population. It's hard to tell how many slaves a wealthy family could have, but it's thought the number ran into the hundreds of individuals.

The assumption that every slave lived a destitute life is one of many inaccurate facts surrounding the Roman slave trade. Slaves were an expensive investment and were often fed, clothed and treated with care. Those with a particular skill, such as cooks, were also highly prized and often lived comfortable lives in a household.

The arts

The Romans were a very expressive people and we can see that in the sheer breadth of mosaics, sculptures, potteries and architecture they produced. At its core, Roman art was a melting pot of other cultures and influences – the Greeks, with their love of pillared architecture and white stone statues, became a major influence. As did the Etruscans, the people that preceded the Romans with their love of wall painting and bronze statues.

During the Republican era, art became a way to express one's position. Paintings and wall carvings of military successes were commissioned by the state and positioned around the city, while wealthy men had their likenesses immortalised in a bust. Most chose to have their features aged – this was to present a man who had given his life to support the Republic. Roman art was often a representation of status, especially in the Imperial era where the 'classical', or Greek, style was re-embraced as the emperors attempted to reconnect with Rome's past.

THE ROMAN KINGDOM 753–509 BCE

Rome is founded/ Romulus becomes king

753 BCE

Once a series of warring tribes and clans, the strongest among them are united underneath the warrior general Romulus. He installs himself as king and forms the very first incarnation of the Senate. The eldest members from the most powerful and influential gentes (clans) are chosen, Italy's deeply patriarchal makeup placing a great deal of importance on the wisdom of its older male members. Around 100 are chosen by Romulus, and the Senate begins by taking care of the day-to-day running of the kingdom. Together, the very first laws of the land are written and the first standing armies formed.

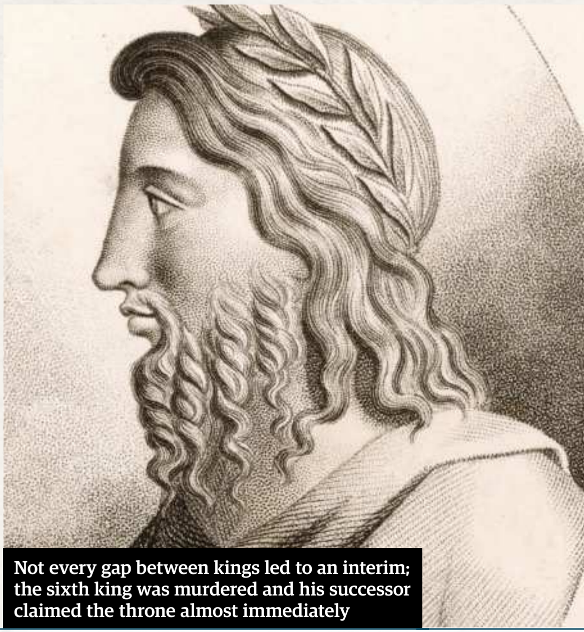
Romulus and his brother Remus, are as steeped in legend and myth as they are in actual history

The Roman style of architecture lives on in the 18th century neoclassical style that can be seen to this day

The interim begins

716 BCE

Following the apparent death of Romulus, by order of the Senate, Rome enters an interregnum. This is a period of year or less where the traditional form of government simply does not exist, where one king has died but another has yet to be determined. The democratic principles of the Roman Kingdom state that only the Senate or a similar body has the power to make a king, so over a period of a year, ten different men rule the kingdom one after the other. This provides the Senate with the information it needs to select one of them as the next king.



Not every gap between kings led to an interim; the sixth king was murdered and his successor claimed the throne almost immediately

Romulus passes away
Around 716 BCE, Romulus mysteriously disappears during a storm. Some legends say he was murdered, but the reality is the kingdom no longer had a king.
716 BCE

Tullus Hostilius becomes king
After a short interregnum, the candidate Tullus Hostilius is selected as king. Unlike his predecessor, Hostilius is a monarch more interested in conquest than peace.
673 BCE

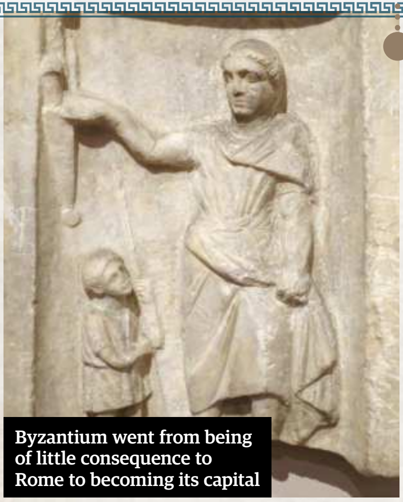
Tullus Hostilius passes away
With a reign that sees Rome's borders expand like never before, the warlike Tullus Hostilius dies. His reign is likened to that of Romulus.
642 BCE

753 BCE — 716 BCE — 715 BCE — 673 BCE — 667 BCE — 642 BCE — 617 BCE

Numa Pompilius is elected king
With the interregnum now over, the Senate swears Sabine noble Numa Pompilius in as king. According to Roman historian Plutarch, Pompilius was born on the day of Rome's founding.
715 BCE

Numa Pompilius passes away
Following a reign that saw many of Rome's religious institutions founded, including many of its temples, Pompilius dies.
673 BCE

Ancus Marcius passes away
The fourth legendary king of the Romans, who helped reaffirm Numa Pompilius' work on Rome's religious infrastructure, dies.'
617 BCE

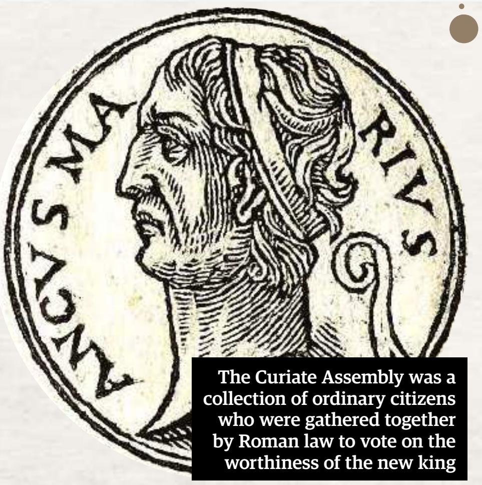


Byzantium went from being of little consequence to Rome to becoming its capital

Byzantium is founded

667 BCE

Around 667 BCE, the first roots of Byzantium are sown; a nation that will go on to be a foe and an eventual conqueror of Rome. According to legend, the city was founded by Byzas, who sailed from a city-state near Athens called Megara. With its position at the only entrance to the Black Sea, Byzantium would grow into a powerful nation fuelled by its steady trade.



The Curiate Assembly was a collection of ordinary citizens who were gathered together by Roman law to vote on the worthiness of the new king

Curiate Assembly elects Ancus Marcius

642 BCE

As with many kings who ruled in the Regal era, an interim period took place between Hostilius and his successor. In between the election of the new king, an interrex is established (meaning a regent of sorts is appointed to look after the kingdom). The Senate selects suitable candidates before the people of Rome vote for who they want to rule them. The legislative group that appoints the new leader, Ancus Marcius, is known as the Curiate Assembly.

The Forum's central building is constructed

600 BCE

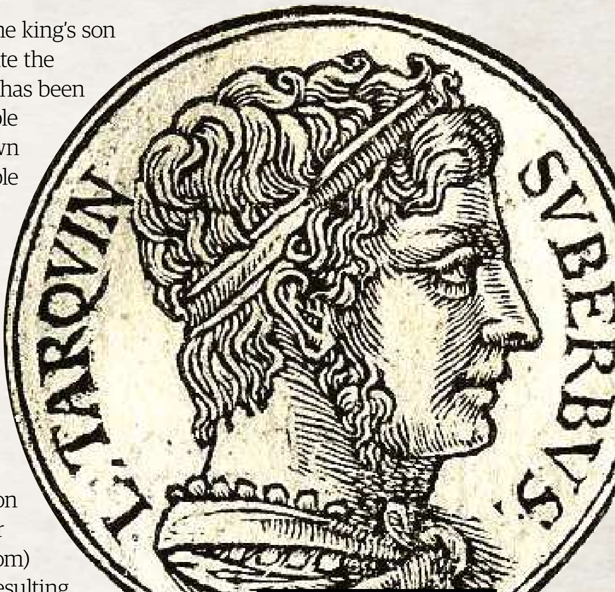
Perhaps the most important structure in Rome's history. the Forum in Rome becomes the home of the Senate and many of the state's important legislative decisions. It is under Lucius Tarquinius Priscus' reign that construction on the Forum is finished. Each of the previous kings had made some pilgrimage in this area, from draining it of water to the building of simple temples. Priscus' contribution is to have the main rectangular building constructed and the entire plaza paved. The Forum becomes a symbol of Rome's democratic heartbeat. More contributions will be made to it over the course of history.

The Roman Forum is still standing today and remains one of the city's most iconic structures

The Roman monarchy is overthrown

509 BCE

The rape of Lucretia by the king's son provides the spark to ignite the political powder keg that has been filling for years. The people and the Senate have grown increasingly uncomfortable with the actions of the king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, and his tyrannical rule. His obsession with architecture and building has largely exhausted the royal coffers and his foolish choice of military campaigns (based more on elevating his status rather than bettering the kingdom) leads the people to riot, resulting in his exile and the abolition of the monarchy itself.

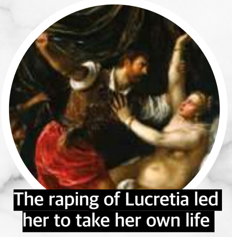


The overthrow of the monarchy leads to the formation of the Republic

Oldest Latin inscriptions
The very earliest examples of written Latin dates back to around this time. It's possible this was when the Romans began actively recording their laws.
600 BCE

The Cloaca Maxima is built
Under the direction of Priscus, the first true Roman sewer is built beneath the centre of Rome. More primitive versions had been attempted, but this was the first true version.
578 BCE

Tullius builds city walls
In the first example of a Roman leader actively working to protect the city from foes, Tullius begins constructing walled defences around Rome.
550 BCE



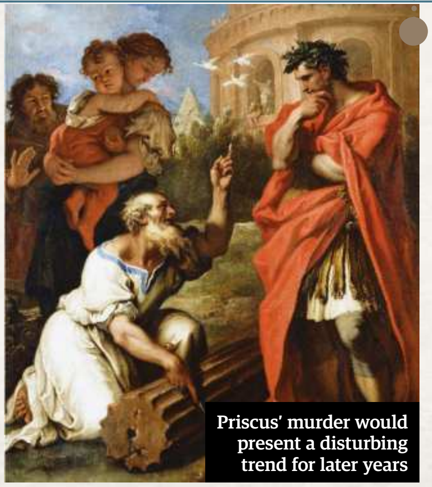
The raping of Lucretia led her to take her own life

616 BCE · 600BC · 579 BCE · 578 BCE · 575 BCE · 550 BCE · 535 BCE · 509 BCE

Lucius Tarquinius Priscus is elected
The fifth king of the Regal era, once again elected by the people, is found in the ambitious politician Lucius Tarquinius Priscus.
616 BCE

Servius Tullius becomes king
Following a period of time as regent, the Senate determines him a suitable candidate and elects him as the sixth king (and the second of Etruscan descent).
575 BCE

Superbus' son rapes a patrician
With Superbus already a deeply unpopular king known for his tyrannical rule, the news that his son Sextus has raped the patrician Lucretia is the final act that sends the kingdom into turmoil.
509 BCE



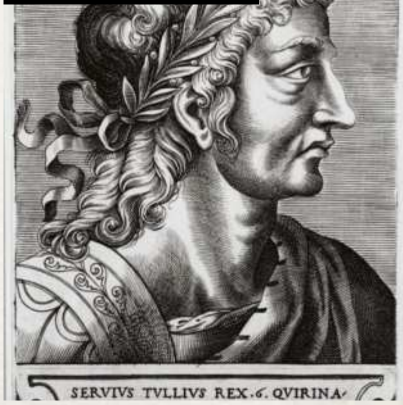
Priscus' murder would present a disturbing trend for later years

Priscus dies in a riot

579 BCE

In the first example of a Roman leader being murdered, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus dies during a riot organised by the son of the previous leader, Ancus Marcius. According to legend, the sons of Ancus Marcius believe the throne should have passed to them so they organise a riot among the people and strike Priscus over the head in the chaos. It's said Priscus' wife finds her husband wounded but not dead, and uses the time to name the Etruscan Servius Tullius as regent.

Servius Tullius set the financial and military infrastructure of the nation



Servius Tullius is assassinated

535 BCE

In another example of a disturbing trend in Roman succession, the king Servius Tullius is assassinated after 44 years of rule by his own daughter Tullia and her husband Tarquinius Superbus. Tullius had been a popular king, orchestrating a number of reforms. Superbus convinces the Senate to elect him king regardless and he becomes the seventh (and final) king of Rome. And so begins one of the least popular reigns.

THE ROMAN REPUBLIC 509–27 BCE

Roman Republic established

509 BCE

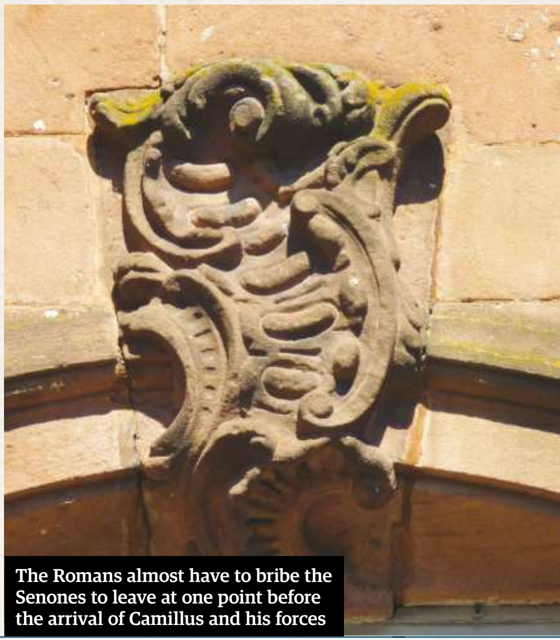
Following the overthrow of the monarchy and the exile of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the Senate establishes a new republic. In this new form, two leaders will rule cooperatively as consuls, elected for a single year each. With the formation of the Roman Republic, new powers are granted to the Senate and to the Plebeian council, giving the people more power and influence over the laws that govern their home. It is decreed that Rome will never again recognise a king of Rome and subsequently elects Lucius Junius Brutus and Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus as its first joint consuls.

Lucius Junius Brutus is on the left, shown between his lictors, a type of bodyguard to magistrates

Senones sack Rome

390 BCE

In 390 BCE, Rome suffers its worst domestic disaster as the Senones reach and sack the city. On what is believed to be 18 July, the Romans march to meet the forces of the Senones, a large Gallic tribe that has invaded northern Italy. Despite their usual successes against the barbarians, the Romans are almost completely routed, leaving the path to Rome open for the Senones. The Senones find a city largely undefended, and therefore proceed to murder many of its elders, burn buildings to the ground and loot everything they can. Eventually, a Roman general called Camillus arrives with a relief force and destroys the Senones.



The Romans almost have to bribe the Senones to leave at one point before the arrival of Camillus and his forces

Battle of Silva Arsia
Republican forces meet those loyal to the deposed and exiled king at the Battle of Silva Arsia. Superbus' forces are defeated, but Lucius Junius Brutus is killed in battle.
509 BCE

Marriage between patricians and plebeians legalised
In another move created to foster the growing sense of equality between the high-ranking patricians and the normal plebeians, marriage between the two is legalised.
445 BCE

Roman soldiers earn a wage
For the first time in the history of Rome, Roman soldiers are finally granted and paid a standing wage. This is due to the wealth brought in by the army's growing list of conquests and new lands.
396 BCE

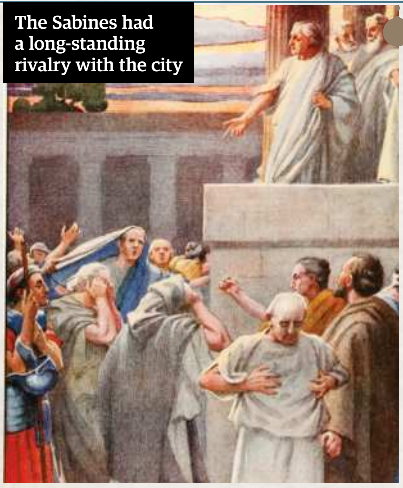
First Plebeian praetor elected
Despite the political struggles between the patricians and the plebeians, the very first plebeian praetor is elected into office.
337 BCE

509 BCE · 501 BCE · 449 BCE · 445 BCE · 443 BCE · 396 BCE · 390 BCE · 337 BCE · 293 BCE

Plebeian council given new powers
As further evidence of Rome's growing sense of democracy, the Plebeian Council (formerly known as the Curiate Assembly) is granted the power to help make Roman laws.
449 BCE

Three consular tribunes established
The offices of the Tribuni militum consulari potestate is established. It's a set of three councils who will hold the power of the consuls in order to settle a power struggle between plebeians and patricians.
443 BCE

Roman census is conducted
In and around 293 BCE, the Office of the Censor conducts an official census which shows the population of Rome has swelled to around 300,000 people.
293 BCE



The Sabines had a long-standing rivalry with the city

Senate passes dictator law

501 BCE

Despite the realm's difficult past with a single man holding too much power, the Senate decides emergency laws are needed to grant temporary ultimate power to an individual in the event of a crisis. This is known as the senatus consultum. With the threat of a Sabine invasion looming, Titus Lartius and Postumus Cominius Auruncus select the former as dictator.

The loss was a substantial one for the Gauls with around 40,000 killed and another 10,000 taken as prisoners to be sold into slavery

Rome halts a Gallic invasion

225 BCE

The Battle of Telamon in 225 BCE halts a potentially disastrous Gallic invasion. Rome had formed a peace with a handful of the Gallic tribes to the north of Italy's borders. However, a new alliance of Gauls seemingly ignores this and begins moving troops into northern Italy with their eye on Rome. Roman forces under the command of consuls Gaius Atilius Regulus and Lucius Aemilius Papus march to Telamon and defeat the Gauls, extending Roman influence.

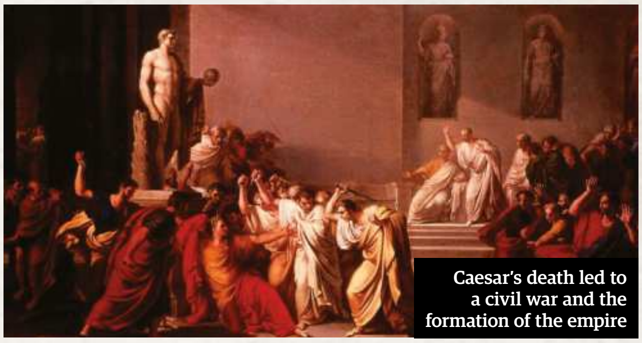
Battle of Arausio

105 BCE

The Battle of Arausio represents one of Rome's worst military defeats and marks a turning point in the relationship between consuls. It also leads to many important reforms. The battle begins when a large Gallic tribe, the Cimbri, start migrating through Gaul, which causes an imbalance in the hierarchy of the tribes. With the Cimbri now growing in number, two armies under the command of consuls Quintus Servilius Caepio and Gnaeus Mallius Maximus arrive to meet them. However, tactical disagreements between the two leaders have disastrous results with over 100,000 Roman soldiers dying.

The defeat at Arausio was a wake-up call for Rome, and led to serious reforms

© Karl Hammer



Caesar's death led to a civil war and the formation of the empire

Julius Caesar is assassinated

44 BCE

In the build-up to his assassination, Julius Caesar had risen from consul and member of the First Triumvirate to the most powerful seat in the land. He was not, as is sometimes incorrectly assumed, an emperor, but a dictator who was voted into that position by the Senate in 49 BCE and then again in 45 BCE. The Senate passed a vote making him dictator perpetuo, a role that made many senators who had not voted in his favour fearful that Caesar would install himself as king. On the Ides of March, a conspiracy is put into motion that sees Caesar betrayed by his allies and stabbed to death in the Theatre of Pompey.

225 BCE · 146 BCE · 121 BCE · 105 BCE · 91 BCE · 73 BCE · 59 BCE · 44 BCE · 30 BCE · 27 BCE

Province of Macedonia established

After a series of long wars with the tribes of Macedonia, the lands are eventually absorbed into the republic and made a province of Rome.

146 BCE

First senatus consultum ultimum

In 121 BCE, the first senatus consultum ultimum is passed by the Senate, granting consul Lucius Opimius emergency powers to defeat the forces of Gaius Gracchus.

121 BCE

The Social War

The Social War erupts when a series of Roman cities (known collectively as the Latins) rebel against the inequality in land ownership and wealth between Rome and its allies.

91-88 BCE

First Triumvirate formed

The first Triumvirate, an alliance between three of Rome's most powerful politicians (Julius Caesar, Pompey and Marcus Licinius Crassus) is formed.

59 BCE

Province of Egypt established

Around 30 BCE, Egypt's dominance of North Africa has faded and it is absorbed into Rome, becoming a Roman province as a result.

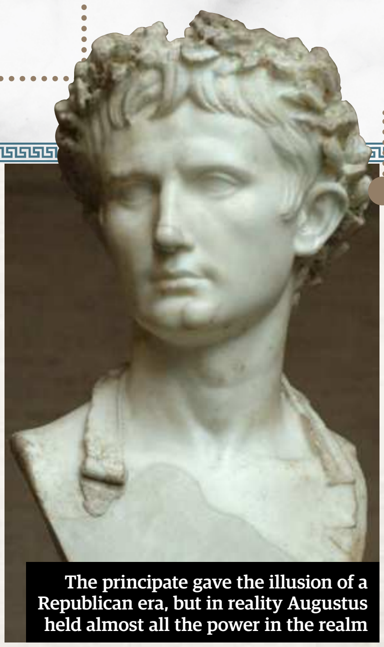
30 BCE

Spartacus' rebellion had an impact on both masters and slaves for decades to come

Third Servile War begins

73-71 BCE

The third and final slave rebellion, which is led by Spartacus, is the only servile uprising to threaten the stability of Rome itself. A band of escaped gladiators begins swelling with slaves who wish to know true freedom. Under the leadership of slave and gladiator Spartacus, the loosely armed rebels defeat a number of Roman forces before Roman commander Marcus Licinius Crassus crushes the uprising.



The principate gave the illusion of a Republican era, but in reality Augustus held almost all the power in the realm

Augustus is made emperor

27 BCE

Following the death of his great-uncle Julius Caesar, Gaius Octavius, known as Octavian at this point, forms the Second Triumvirate with Mark Antony and Marcus Lepidus to find his assassins. The alliance causes a civil war. Lepidus is eventually driven into exile and Mark Antony commits suicide following his defeat at the Battle of Actium. Still granted the ultimate power of office by the Senate, Augustus begins creating a framework with the Senate, beginning the empire.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE 27 BCE – 476 CE

Roman conquest of Britain

43 CE

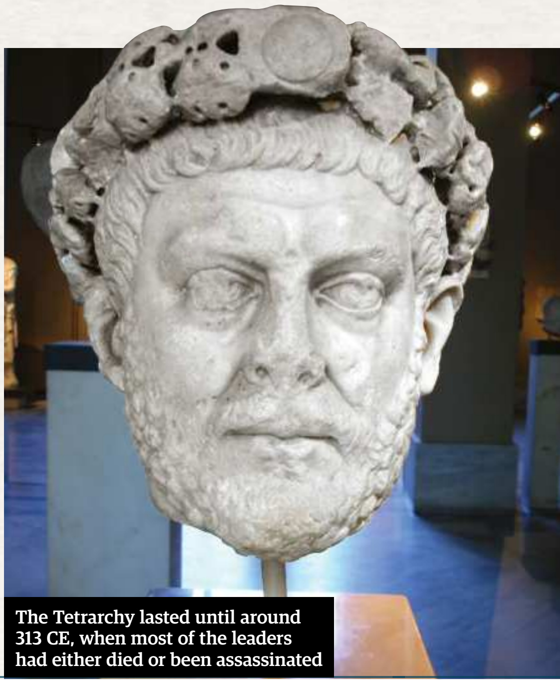
Prior to Emperor Claudius' campaign to conquer Britannia once and for all, the Romans have enjoyed a relatively healthy trading relationship with the tribes of Britain since Julius Caesar's first settlements in 55 BCE. However, the Catuvellauni have taken over from the Trinovantes as the most powerful kingdom in southeastern Britain. The Catuvellauni begin encroaching on the land of the Roman-loyal Atrebates, forcing Rome to send troops to pacify Britannia once and for all. The campaign eventually takes the Romans through England and into Scotland.

Britain provided considerable resources for the Empire, but it was a difficult province to control

Diocletian established the Tetrarchy

293 CE

Following almost 50 years of chaos, civil war and divided states, the politician Diocletian is recognised as emperor by the Senate and establishes a new form of governance - the Tetrarchy. Alongside three other co-emperors, Diocletian divides the Roman Empire into four separate states to be governed by each individual emperor with mutual cooperation between all four sections of the realm. The concept, for a time, proves a success, with every state having its own capital and standing armies. However, despite the joint nature of the nation, Diocletian is ultimately the supreme leader.



The Tetrarchy lasted until around 313 CE, when most of the leaders had either died or been assassinated

Senate grants Augustus new titles
As part of Octavian's new position as the ultimate ruler of Rome, the Senate grants him the titles of Augustus, Majestic and also Princeps.
27 BCE

Great Fire of Rome
Legend says that the fires that consumed a significant proportion of Rome's infrastructure was in fact set by Emperor Nero himself. Nero blames the Christians, leading to a bloody purge.
64 CE

Colosseum is completed
In 80 BCE, the largest amphitheatre ever built is finally finished in the heart of Rome. It can house 50,000 spectators and becomes a symbol of Rome's endless passion for bloodsports.
80 CE

Crisis of the Third Century
The Crisis of the Third Century is a half-century-long period of civil war and turmoil as 26 different emperors are crowned and Rome splits into three different states.
235 CE

Battle of Carthage
Forces loyal to the joint emperors Gordian I and his son Gordian II are destroyed by those belonging to emperor Maximinus Thrax. Gordian I is killed and Gordian II soon commits suicide.
238 CE

27 BCE · 43 CE · 60 CE · 64 CE · 80 CE · 122 CE · 165 CE · 235 CE · 238 CE · 260 CE

Boudicca's revolt in Britannia
One of the biggest revolts in Roman Britain is led by the queen of the Iceni, Boudica. She leads a force of 100,000 men but is ultimately defeated.
60 CE

Hadrian's Wall is started
In order to keep the barbarians of Scotland and the north of Britannia at bay, Emperor Hadrian orders a wall to be constructed. It becomes known as Hadrian's Wall and survives to this day.
122 CE

Emperor Valerian taken prisoner
In a shock development for the Roman Empire, the emperor Valerian is taken captive during a battle with the Sassanid Persian Empire. He dies in captivity.
260 CE

At its height, the plague killed 2,000 Romans a day

The Antonine Plague strikes

165 CE

One of the worst pandemics to ever ravage Rome, the Antonine Plague (likely a form of smallpox or perhaps an early form of measles) ends up claiming the lives of over 5 million Romans. It is thought the plague was brought back with troops returning from the Near East. The plague, which rages on and off for around 15 years, even claims the life of the co-emperor Lucius Verus.

Constantine's reforms changed Rome forever, including a new coinage to battle inflation

Constantine becomes first Christian emperor

306 CE

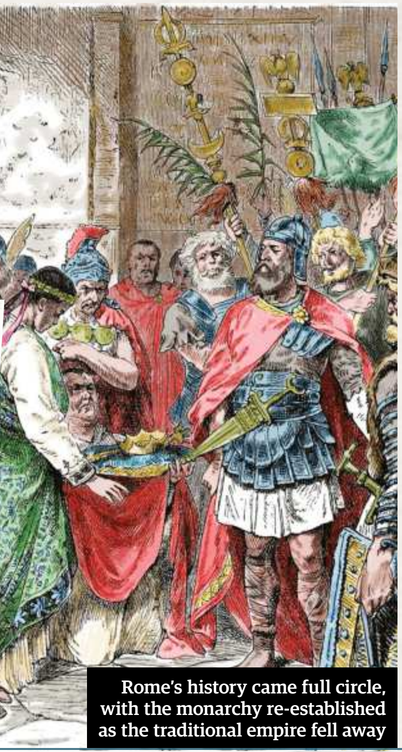
Christians had an uneasy relationship with the religion of Rome. In fact, as recently as Diocletian, the Christian community had been demonised and purged. However, that all changed when Constantine - the son of one of the first members of the Tetrarchy - becomes the sole emperor. He sets about reforming the national mindset and even chairs the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE where an assembly of bishops is called to create a consensus of modern Christianity.

Rome is divided into two empires

395 CE

A direct result of Constantine's desire to rule the Roman Empire from the East in Byzantium, it is decided that the realm should be operated by the two imperial administrations. The empire is initially divided by Theodosius I upon his deathbed, who carves it into the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire, and granting rule to his two sons. As a result, Arcadius becomes Augustus of the eastern Byzantine Empire and his brother Honorius becomes emperor of the Western Empire. To the Romans, the country is far from divided - instead, the notion of two separate governments looking after one country is seen as the norm.

For a time, the governance of the Western Roman Empire fell to regent Stilicho before his ineptitude at the task led him to arrest and execution in 408 CE



Rome's history came full circle, with the monarchy re-established as the traditional empire fell away

Western Roman Empire falls

476 CE

By the middle of the 5th century, the Western Roman Empire is a shadow of its former self. The position of emperor no longer wields the power and respect it once did, and the West lacks the stability of the Byzantine Empire to the east. The current emperor, Romulus Augustulus, has been installed by his father a year prior, but he doesn't have the support of the people or the Senate. This leads to the military commander Odoacer leading a revolt that removes the emperor and his installation as patrician. With the support of the Senate, he is the first king of Italy.

Visigoths sack Rome

For the first time in 800 years, Rome is successfully overrun by an enemy. The city is sacked and almost burned to the ground by the Visigoths, led by their king, Alaric.

410 CE

293 CE

306 CE

330 CE

395 CE

410 CE

476 CE

Capital moved from Rome to Constantinople

As part of Constantine the Great's systematic upheaval of Roman values, he abandons Rome and sets up his new capital, Constantinople, in modern-day Istanbul.

330 CE

> "The Roman Empire was ahead of its time, with even the Dark Ages failing to eliminate its mark"

The lasting effect of the Roman Empire

The Roman Kingdom, Republic and Empire were very powerful, so it's no surprise to see the imprint of that nation today. From language to infrastructure, the Roman Empire was a state far ahead of its time, with even the regressive years of the Dark Ages failing to eliminate its mark.

Latin, the official language of the Empire, didn't die with the realm but instead flourished. It was adopted as the official language of the Catholic Church and became the ipso facto language of the sciences. It can be found in English, German, Dutch and many other modern dialects. Our calendars owe their structure and style to the Romans – the Julian calendar, introduced by Julius Caesar, made the year 365 days long and divided it into 12 months. It was also the Romans who chose to begin the year in January and add a leap year every four years in February. The Romans also introduced the seven-day week, with the planets forming their names (except Sunday which has its origins in Christianity).

The Romans' use of democracy and forums is still seen among countless nations, while its embrace of Christianity under Constantine the Great helped secure Rome as the home of the Catholic Church. Elsewhere, the Romans' use of sewers, aqueducts and roads showed the rest of the world how to build lasting infrastructure.

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Day in the life

ANCIENT SEA PEOPLES

The mysterious civilisation that terrorised ancient waterways

Mediterranean Sea, 1275-1000 BCE

During the golden years of the Hittite and Egyptian civilisations, there was one threat that simply would not go away: the Sea Peoples were the pirates of their day and terrorised the most powerful societies of the ancient world. They were a nomadic civilisation, plundering across the Mediterranean and migrating to suit their needs. More powerful on the ocean than on land, the Sea Peoples never truly stamped their authority, and as a result their real nationality and ethnicity remain unknown. One thing is for sure: they were a thorn in the side of anyone that crossed them.

RISE AND SHINE

An early wake-up call was essential. Competition for food and other resources was fierce, so getting up at the crack of dawn and swiftly heading out on coracle boats significantly increased the chances of claiming the biggest haul of supplies. If all the resources in the locality were exhausted, it was time for the group to move on, possibly running into other powers.

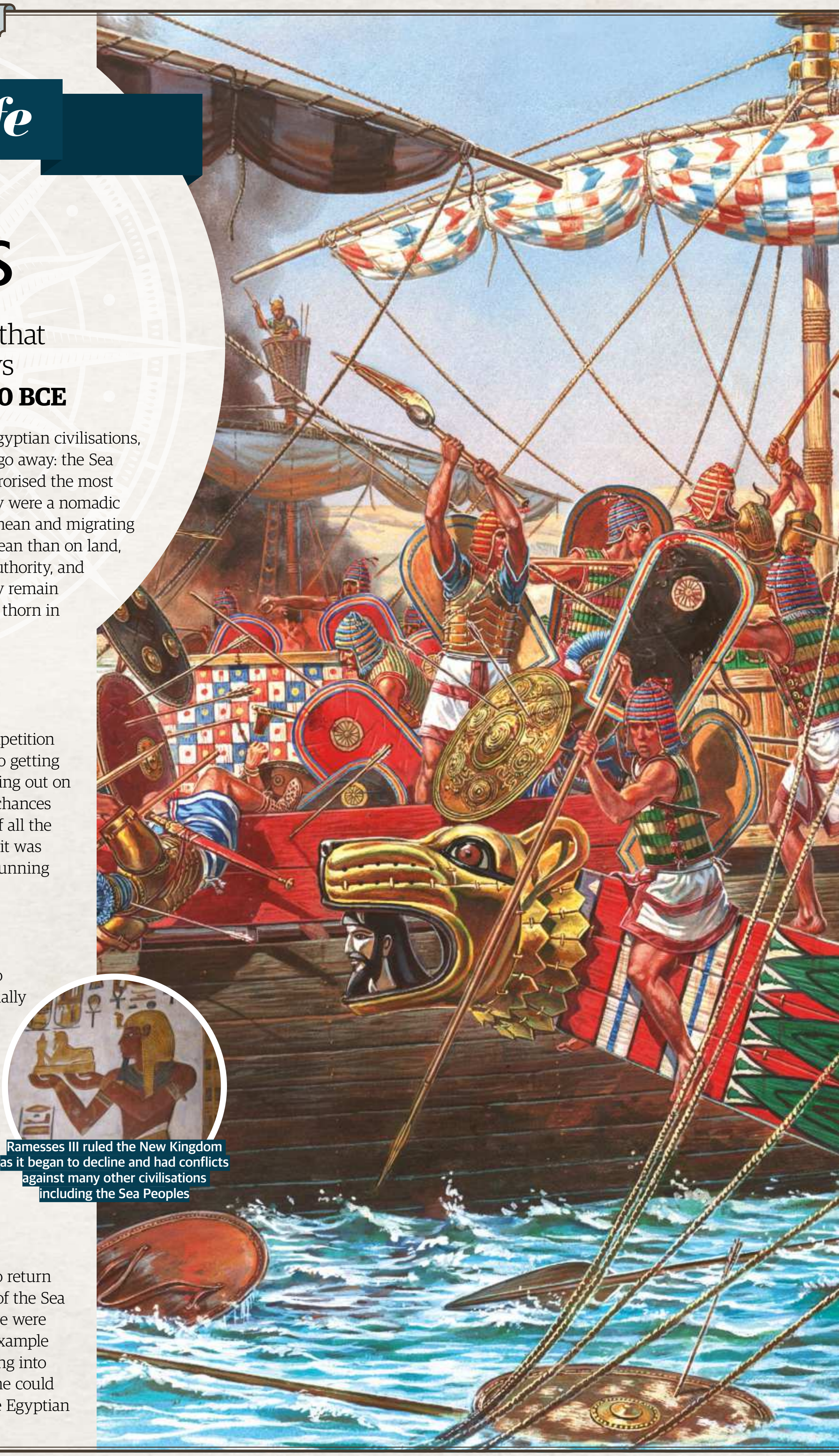
EARLY SKIRMISHES

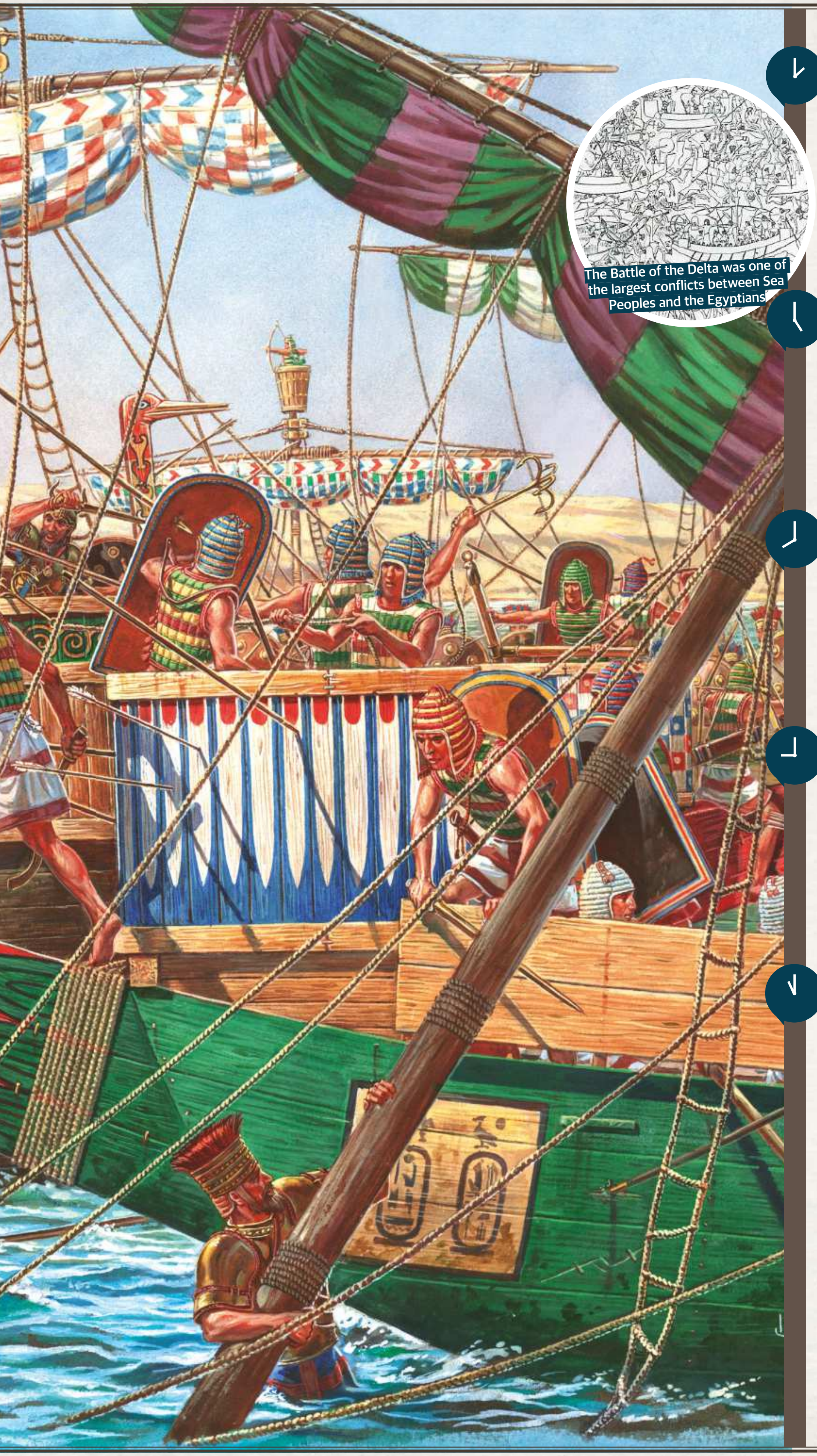
The Sea Peoples were expert mariners, so coastal raids of up to 20 vessels were usually successful ventures. Using sharp daggers, they were protected by conical helmets and a bronze cuirass. Hit and run was their most successful tactic, and an early morning assault meant it was an in and out job before the bulk of the enemy military could respond.

Ramesses III ruled the New Kingdom as it began to decline and had conflicts against many other civilisations including the Sea Peoples

RETURN TO THE COSTAL COMMUNITY

After a successful skirmish, it was time to return with the plunder. The societal hierarchy of the Sea Peoples was relatively unknown, but there were men known as 'Great Ones' who led by example in a military and political capacity. Heading into enemy territory was always a risk, as some could be seduced by the promise of a life in the Egyptian or Hittite civilisations.





The Battle of the Delta was one of the largest conflicts between Sea Peoples and the Egyptians

TO BATTLE

Despite being primarily seafaring folk, the Sea Peoples still had up-to-date military gear. Using what they had plundered earlier in the day, the military would ride into battles on chariots with long thrusting spears. The resources of the Egyptians would often tip the balance in their favour, however, so a popular tactic of the Sea Peoples was to go into battle as allies of the Hittites.

TIMED RETREAT

The Sea Peoples were at their best in hit-and-run attacks. Unable to match the strength of the Egyptian military, quick skirmishes were the most successful tactic especially when not backed up by Hittite allies. One such example was the Battle of Djahy where the Sea Peoples had to make a hasty retreat to escape the clutches of Ramesses III.

ANOTHER WITHDRAWAL

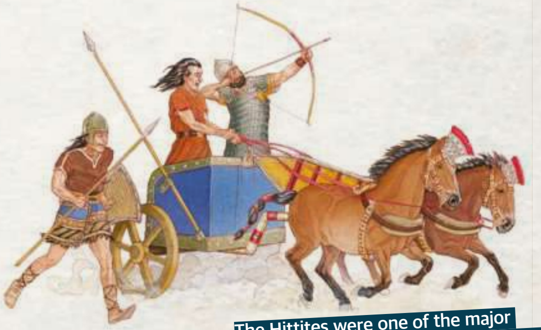
Hit and run was the name of the game for attacks by the Sea Peoples, but the Egyptians soon got wise. After the retreat, Ramesses would have archers hidden along the shoreline to rain down arrows. Any failure would diminish their culture more and over time they were thought to have absorbed Egyptian customs and lost their identity.

DESIRE TO GO INLAND

Forever known as shoreline raiders, the Sea Peoples were actually keen on establishing inland settlements. After a victorious battle, household goods and building materials would be carried back with the soldiers along with women and children from the group. In the wake of another defeat, that evening they would lament on an opportunity lost to colonise new lands.

TO BED

The day done, possessions would be stashed in ox-drawn carts and they would go to bed with the same thoughts every night: the fear of Egyptian retribution, yet determination to fight once more to gain new lands. As long as they kept out of the clutches of the major powers in the Mediterranean, they were free to continue their pirate ways.



The Hittites were one of the major civilisations of the ancient era but declined after a period of turmoil instigated by raids by the Sea Peoples

© Archaeological reconstruction of Raffaele D'Amato and Andrea Salimbeti, Colour plate of Igor Dzis

The Mycenaeans

The 19th-century archaeological investigations at Mycenae in southern Greece revealed a Bronze-Age citadel that dominated the local area and lent its name to the wider network of palace states across Greece between 1600 and 1100 BCE. Like many other contemporary Eastern Mediterranean civilisations, Mycenaean Greece came to a sudden and as yet unexplained end – possibly the victim of invasion, natural disaster or climate change – and would later be used as the setting for Homer's epic poems.

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INTRODUCING THE PICTS

Meet the Romans' northern neighbours and discover how they clashed over the border

Written by Benjamin Hudson

Hadrian's Wall facing east towards Crag Lough

The Picts inhabited northern Britain, a region that the Romans always regarded as menacing. That area was north of a line running from (to use modern names) the Solway Firth across to the mouth of the River Tyne, a region that was never permanently subdued by the imperial forces. Roman operations there began a generation after the successful Claudian invasion of the island; expeditions were repeatedly sent north and led by experienced commanders such as the famous Agricola. Manpower was supplemented by physical structures when Hadrian's Wall was built between 122 and 128 CE.

Another wall/earthen work barrier was built further north known as the Antonine Wall, which was manned only occasionally. After the 3rd century, the imperial border was once again marked by Hadrian's Wall.

Initially, the Romans used 'Briton' as a general term for the inhabitants of the northern regions, who would later be described as 'Picts'. Writing in the 3rd century in connection with the expedition of Emperor Septimius Severus, the historian Cassius Dio noted that the Britons beyond Hadrian's Wall were divided into two large confederations called the Maeatae, who lived next to the wall, and the Caledonians, who lived beyond them. He also noted that there were many individual tribes within those larger collectives. Despite the troops at his command, Severus was constantly outmanoeuvred and his opponents refused to give him the satisfaction of a set battle. Using livestock as bait, the Britons lured the Romans into swamps, where they either drowned or couldn't fight.

Concerning their customs, Cassius Dio notes that the Britons outside the empire were fierce, had wives and children in common and did not wear clothes other than iron bands. His comments were expanded by another contemporary named Herodian, who explains that iron was a precious metal among those people and that they refused to wear clothes in order to display the designs and images of animals on their bodies.

The body art explains the name 'Pict', which was used circa 296 when a schoolmaster of Gaul named Eumenius wrote a poem in praise of Constantius Chlorus, one of the empire's Augusti who had successfully put down a rebellion in Britain. The victory was made easier, according to Eumenius, because the Britons practised war only on barbarians such as the Picts. A decade later, Constantius led another expedition in Britain; this time verses declare that his success in the swamps and forests of the Caledonians and other Picts were the least of his accomplishments. When Constantius died at York in 306, the command was taken by his famous son Constantine, later known as 'the Great'. In both sets of verses, the name 'Pict' is clearly derogatory and likely reflects a slang term used by the soldiers, echoing the association of body art with savagery.

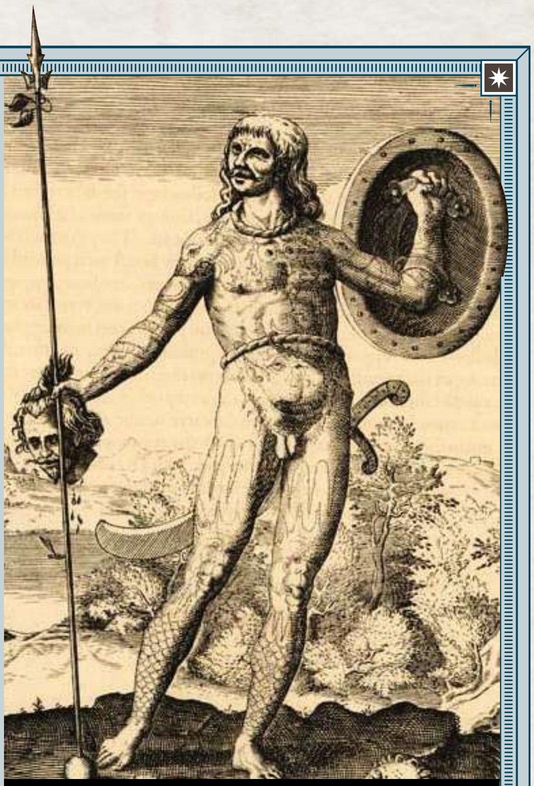
By the middle of the 4th century, the Picts were becoming much more militarily active. Much

The painted men

Uncover the story of the Picts' tattoos

The name Pict comes from the Latin 'pictus', meaning 'painted one'. The name probably was slang used by Roman soldiers (who equated body art with savagery) for the Britons living outside the empire. Were the Picts practising actual tattooing or was it merely body painting? In the 5th century, during the reign of Emperor Honorius, the poet Claudian describes the "painted life" flowing out of a Pict.

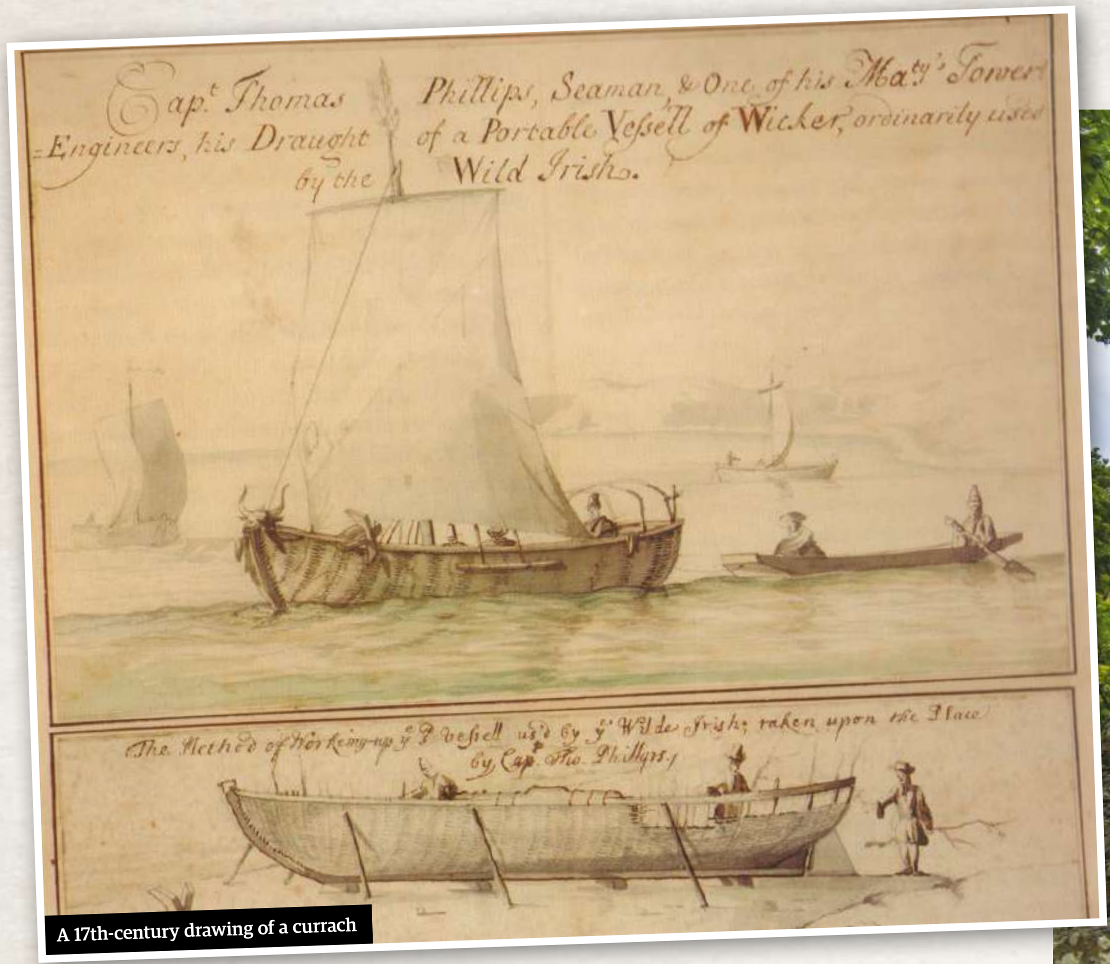
According to a Spanish bishop named Isidore, writing a century and a quarter later, they did tattoo. In his Etymologies, in a discussion of the characteristics of peoples, he says that the name 'Pict' refers to their bodies, where an artisan with the tiny point of a pin made scars to serve as identifying marks in the flesh. The scars were then coloured by the juice squeezed from a native plant, and the nobility were distinguished by their tattooed limbs. The juice to which Isidore refers is probably woad, a native British plant with a strong and unpleasant smell whose bluish colour was remarked upon by Julius Caesar. This has led to centuries of speculations on the results.



The Trvve Picture of One Picte*, engraved by Theodor de Bry and published in Thomas Hariot's *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia

> "Severus was constantly outmanoeuvred and his opponents refused to give him the satisfaction of a set battle"

Wheelhouse at Old Scatness, Shetland


Capt Thomas Phillips, Seaman, & One of his Maty's Tower Engineers, his Draught of a Portable Vessell of Wicker, ordinarily used by the Wild Irish.
The Method of Working up ye Vessell us'd by ye Wilde Irish; taken upon the Place by Capt Tho. Phillips.

A 17th-century drawing of a currach

Dun Telve broch near Glenelg in the Scottish Highlands

"The Picts and Irish crossed into imperial territory, while the Franks attacked Gaul along the English Channel"

of what we know comes from a contemporary writer named Ammianus Marcellinus who, in the year 380, wrote a history of Rome of which the 4th-century section survives. To avoid an expensive military confrontation, the Romans attempted to control the situation through diplomacy and spies. The former included the purchasing of goodwill from powerful chieftains. This was an ancient tactic, and one interpretation of the treasure of plate and other items made of precious metals uncovered at Traprain Law in Lothian is that they were payment by imperial officials to local chieftains for peace. The eclectic and unconventional items in the hoard could have been an effort to circumvent a law enacted about 356 that forbade the melting of coins into bullion in order to send it out of the empire.

For espionage, the Roman authorities sent out spies to infiltrate people who might be plotting against Rome. According to Marcellinus, these were known as 'arcani' in Britain. Not surprisingly, exact details are scarce, but the arcani seem to have moved about as merchants or traders who gathered news as they carried out their business.

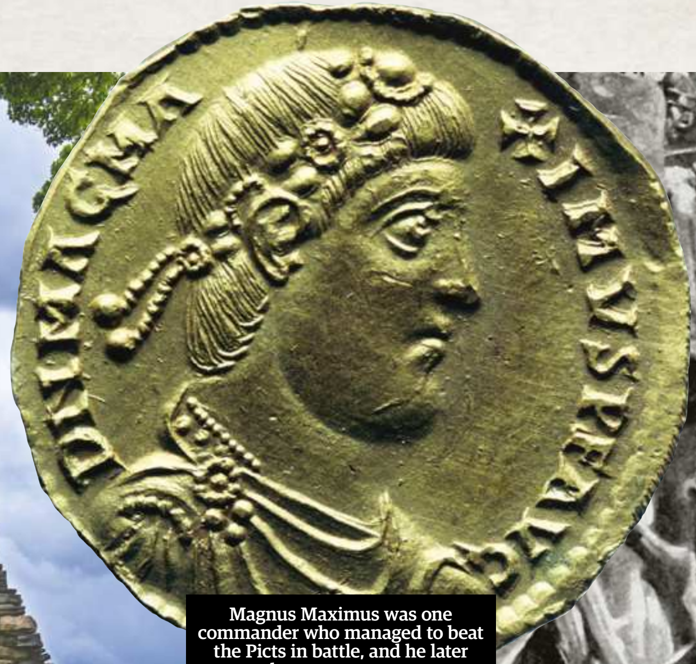
The Romans were more active in trying to prevent raids than mere bribery or spying. Even walls were of limited use, since raiders could sail around them. Writers such Gildas, in his 6th-century sermon *The Ruin of Britain*, claimed that the Picts sailed in currachs, as did their allies the Irish. According to the contemporary Roman military historian Vegetus, the Romans used a type of spy boat known as a 'Pict boat' to scout out raiding parties. These slender crafts, with a crew of 40 men, were completely blue - hull, crew uniforms, rigging and sails - so that they blended in with the sea.

Bribes, spies, boats and walls; the Roman authorities must have thought they had covered all aspects necessary to secure peace. Nevertheless, around the year 360 the Picts and the Scots began to ravage the borderlands in Britain. Emperor Julian 'the Apostate' sent his commander-in-chief Lupicinus to quell the uprising with the authority to negotiate or to use force. Lupicinus was able to negotiate a few years of peace, but conflict arose again in 364. This time, the Picts were joined by the Saxons and the Attacotti, who Saint Jerome claimed were cannibals. Once again, major hostilities were averted.

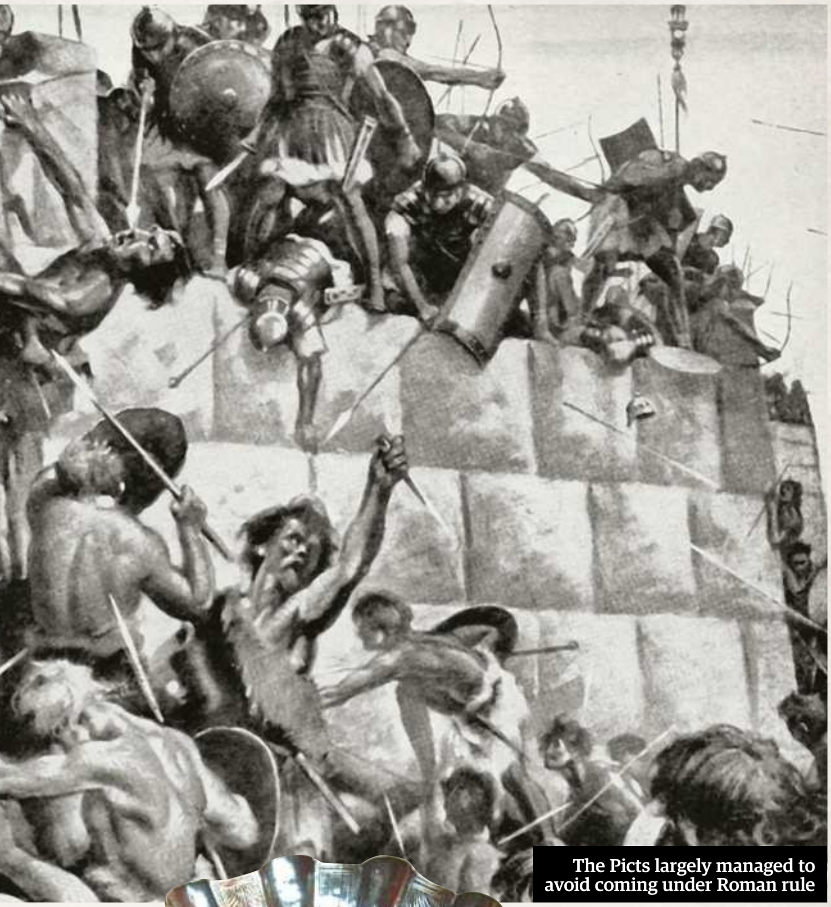
Several years later, during the emperorship of Valentinian, Roman rule in Britain temporarily ended during the 'Barbarian Conspiracy' of 367. The Picts and Irish crossed into imperial territory, while the Franks attacked Gaul along the English Channel, and there were mutinies among the Roman soldiers. Nectaridus, the commander of the Saxon Shore, was killed, and a general named Fullofaudes was captured in an ambush. Emperor Valentinian sent two commanders to remedy the situation; neither accomplished anything, but the second, named Jovinus, returned to Gaul and demanded a large army.

Marcellinus names two tribes of the Picts - the Dicalydones and Verturiones - who together with the Attacotti were ravaging south of Hadrian's Wall. When a third commander, named Theodosius, led his forces to London, he found soldiers, probably foederati (mercenaries), gathering booty from the citizens while driving away cattle and slaves. Theodosius' men defeated the rebels as well as the mutineers, who, after the issue of a general pardon, returned to the garrisons. Using London as a base, Theodosius restored order.

However impressive Theodosius' victory was, it paused rather than ended Pictish belligerence. One of his officers from the British campaign was Magnus Maximus, who gained his own victory over the Picts in a campaign during the year 382. That might have encouraged Magnus to declare himself emperor in 383 and move his army to Gaul.



Magnus Maximus was one commander who managed to beat the Picts in battle, and he later became emperor



The Picts largely managed to avoid coming under Roman rule

Part of the Traprain Law Treasure, East Lothian, Scotland

The Picts took advantage of his absence to move south again. According to Gildas, this was the first of three Pictish wars fought before 450.

There is much speculation about this war. Gildas claims it ended when Magnus was defeated and slain in 388, after which a delegation from Britain sought the victor, General Theodosius' son, now Emperor Theodosius, who sent troops to secure the island. Remaining with Gildas' – probably garbled – interpretation, the imperial troops established the frontier at a turf wall. Whether this refers to the Antonine Wall or is a mistaken reference to Hadrian's Wall is not known decisively.

In addition to warfare, the 4th century was a time of significant changes because of Pictish and Roman contact. Christianity was brought to Britain by the Romans, and at an early date missionaries might have laboured among the peoples who later were described as Picts. The 3rd-century theologian Origen of Alexandria, in his sixth homily on the Gospel of Luke, states, "The power of the Lord and Saviour is with those in Britain, separated from our world." Some of the Picts were Christian by the 4th century – Saint Patrick denounces "apostate Picts" in his letter to Coroticus.

Roman influence might have been responsible for changes in habitations too. By the 4th century the fortifications known as 'brochs' were being abandoned. These were stone towers where people and livestock could shelter from raiders. The livestock were on the ground, while the people were above on wooden platforms. They are often found in the vicinity of subterranean dwellings known as wheelhouses. Like the brochs, the wheelhouses were made of stone and placed to take advantage of the soil's moderating effect on temperature. The cubicles angled out from a central area. Although the wheelhouses continued to be used long after this period, a new type of structure was being built – a rectangular one similar to those used in Gaul and in Britain south of Hadrian's Wall.

Many questions remain about the Picts and Romans as imperial control of Britain was coming to an end. Did recruitment among the Picts provide troops for the various pretenders who rose up in Britain between 383 and 411? Signs of repair and/or abandonment along Hadrian's Wall suggest that patching rather than rebuilding was taking place.

Before we succumb to an interpretation that the Picts carried all before them, Marcellinus claims that Theodosius' campaign was so successful he was able to retake lands that had been outside imperial control for some time; this recovered region he called Valentia. This is confirmed by the Notitia Dignitatum, which lists it as an administrative unit. The question is where was it located? We do not know, but one suggestion is the land between the Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall. Nonetheless, when the Romans departed in 410, the Picts remained and would influence British culture for another 500 years.

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Europe

The Macedonian victory at Grannicus

THE KINGDOM OF MACEDONIA

How a kingdom of 'barbarians' brought Greece beneath its yoke and toppled the mighty Persian Empire before eventually falling to Rome

Written by Will Lawrence

The history of ancient Macedonia stands in the shadow of Alexander III, the 'Great', who, during the course of one remarkable decade, conquered lands that yielded him an empire stretching from the Dardanelles to the borders of India, ushering in the Hellenistic age. His father, Philip II, was also a powerful ruler - the greatest man Europe had yet produced, according to the Greek historian Polybius. With the great Greek city-states of Athens, Sparta and Thebes exhausted by years of struggle and warfare, Philip dragged Macedonia into political pre-eminence, uniting the Greeks under Macedonian hegemony in a successful bid to stave off the advances of the mighty Persian Empire that was perennially casting its covetous eyes westward.

> Macedonia was on a major trade route between some of the ancient world's wealthiest civilisations

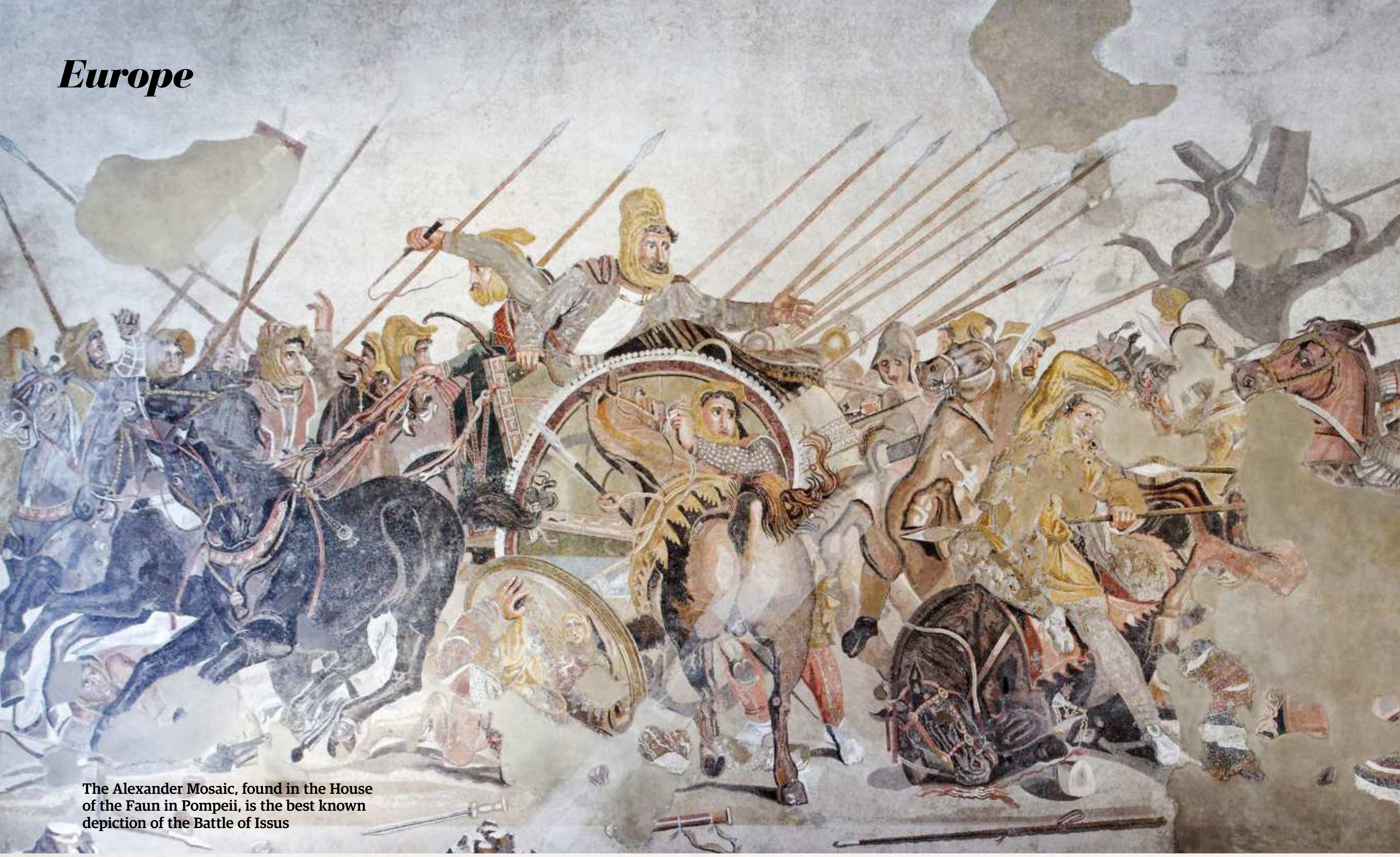
The story of Macedonia does not start with Philip II, however, and nor does it end with Alexander III, though this is where historians find the most fertile ground, frustrated by the lack of extant contemporary historical records. There are no surviving Macedonian texts, forcing historians to piece together a narrative from the classical authors who, at least prior to the reign of Philip II, regarded Macedonia as a primitive land of peripheral importance. In the Homeric *Catalogue of Ships*, which charted the forces allied for the siege of Troy, Macedonia gets no mention.

Yet here was a land that lay at a crossroads, where the Balkans connect with the Greek peninsula, and which had for centuries proved a major trade route. It was a land of tough peasants and horsemen, a fecund land rich with timber that had made a major contribution to the building of Athens' fabled navies. The land's fertility attracted many settlers, and it has been argued that the first people that became known as Macedonians were nomadic goat-herders attracted by its pasture land. There is evidence: the early capital was named Aegae (place of goats), and goats appear often on early coinage. They were also great hunters of wild game and lovers of banquets, an integral part of Macedonian life where the wine was usually consumed undiluted, in contrast to the Greek tradition.

The Macedonians receive no mention in Homeric epic, even in the main body of works that is traditionally dated to the mid-8th century BCE, though there is a story in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (dated to the end of 8th century) that tells of Macedon, the first Macedonian. Herodotus, in his *Histories*, published in the last third of the 5th century, says that the Hellenes were driven west to the Pindus Mountains where they took the name Macedonians. These founding legends are awash with myth, though Herodotus does trace a genealogical line back from the Macedonian king Alexander I, who features in his narrative of the Persian invasions of the early 5th century, tracking him to Perdiccas I, the founder of Macedonian kingship and a descendant of Zeus and Heracles.

This Macedonian royal dynasty is widely known as the Argead dynasty, though some historians believe that the Argeadae were actually a tribe. Whatever the truth, by the 4th century BCE, the Argeadae had adopted Greek as the language of the royal court, though an older Macedonian language was still spoken among the people and the army. There has been much debate about the language and origins of the ancient Macedonians, and certainly the Greeks considered themselves different from their rougher northern neighbours.

One key point of difference was Macedonia's retention of a Homeric-style monarchy, which



The Alexander Mosaic, found in the House of the Faun in Pompeii, is the best known depiction of the Battle of Issus

stood in contrast to the governance of the powerful Greek city-states that were built upon powerful oligarchies. Even mighty Sparta with its dual kingship had evolved a more egalitarian approach (Isocrates refers to the Spartans as "subject to an oligarchy at home, to a kingship on campaign"). But Macedonia, threatened as it was by invasions from Illyria and Thrace, embraced monarchy's ability to maintain a ready defence, and a ruling family had emerged by the middle of the Archaic period that was powerful enough to unite different tribes and expand Macedonia's borders.

Every ruling dynasty claimed descent from the gods as a form of legitimacy, though actually establishing this position of authority required excellent leadership qualities. An Archaic period monarch in a tribal society had many roles, such as performing religious duties, arbitrating in internecine disputes and, crucially, military leadership, in which the early Macedonian kings seemed to have excelled. They built their early military success on their people's horsemanship; the earliest coins carrying the device of a horseman and the *Catalogue of Women* claiming that the Macedonians "delighted in fighting on horseback".

According to the 5th-century historians, the first king, Perdiccas I, established a settlement as a seat of royal power and this was renamed Aegae. The king and his successors then initiated a period of expansion that saw the Macedonians eventually usurp the Paeonians and Thracians as the primary power in the north Aegean.

The three kings whose reigns ran across the 5th century – Alexander I (c.498-454), Perdiccas II (c.454-413) and Archelaus (c.413-399) – did much to

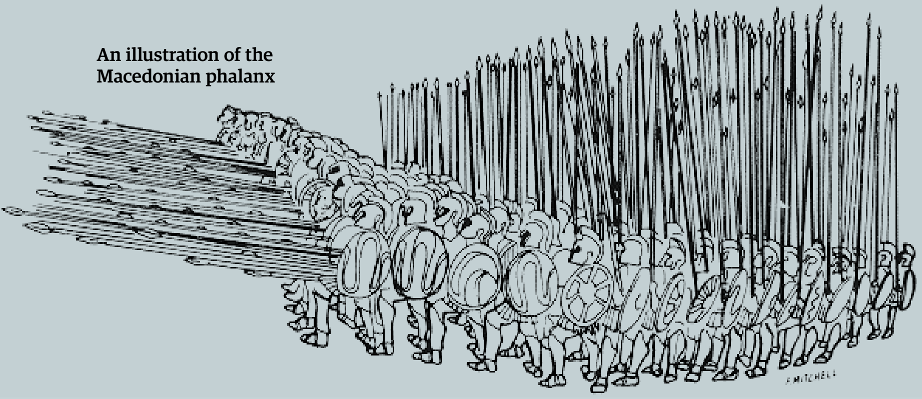
The Macedonian war machine

The reforms of Philip II and Alexander III formed an elite army that conquered all before it

The Macedonians had long been effective horsemen with the king's Companion Cavalry, or hetairoi, emerging as powerful shock troops by the late 5th century. However, under the guidance of Philip II they proved the region's pre-eminent cavalry troops with advanced fighting tactics, wheeling behind the enemy once the infantry had engaged, attacking on the flank and in the rear. They were the hammer, the infantry the anvil.

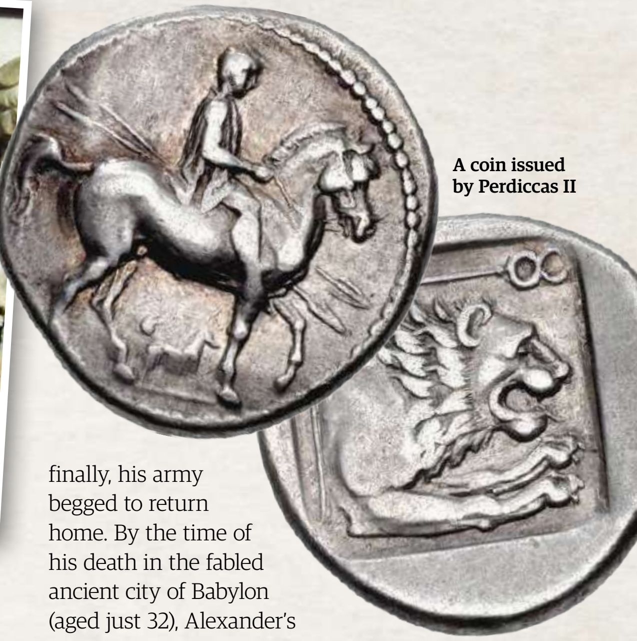
Indeed, Philip did much to advance the Macedonian army, a professional standing force with the infantry phalanx, the pezhetairoi or Foot Companions, at its heart. Philip equipped the phalanx with the new sarissa spear, an innovative pike made from robust cornel wood that stretched some four to six metres in length. It replaced the dory, a much shorter spear, and overlapping in the phalanx formation, made a near-impenetrable bristling wall.

Under Alexander, the Macedonian army with the pezhetairoi at the centre and the hetairoi on the wings proved infallible and won every major set piece during his conquest of the East. He would ride at the head of cavalry, which usually moved into a battle in a wedge formation. Ever adaptable, he re-organised his cavalry in the East and incorporated native troops, trained in Macedonian tactics, into his infantry. He even welcomed war elephants into his army. After his death, the phalanx remained the elite units of war in the Successor kingdoms.



An illustration of the Macedonian phalanx

Alexander the Great fights on horseback using Macedonian tactics at the Battle of Issus



A coin issued by Perdiccas II

establish and maintain this power. The former, for example, cleverly steered a diplomatic course that balanced an allegiance to the warring powers of Persia and Greece during the invasions of the Persian kings Darius and Xerxes. He appears in one story (which most historians consider apocryphal), arriving at the Greek camp before the decisive battle at Platea (where his forces were arraigned on the Persian side) and revealing the invaders’ plans. With the Persians’ defeat he expanded eastward and secured valuable silver and gold mines, as well as more timber.

His two successors, meanwhile, guided Macedonia through the Peloponnesian War, forging conflicting alliances with Athens, Sparta and the Chalcidians, and Archelaus built his kingdom’s infrastructure. And yet, just as Macedonia emerged as a major player in the Aegean, the first half of the 4th century BCE unfolded amid a backdrop of turbulence with five different kings reigning across a period of just 40 years, three dying by an assassin’s hand.

It was not until Philip II (359-336) succeeded his brother Peridccas III, who died fighting the Illyrians, that Macedonia finally began to exert control over its powerful neighbours.

Philip avenged his brother, defeating the Illyrians before expanding Macedonian power into Thessaly and Thrace and setting the Athenians on high alert. Over a long period of posturing, Athens and Macedonia jostled for position before the southern Greek superpower finally declared war in 340, though Philip brought the conflict to a swift conclusion with the decisive Battle of Chaeronea in the following year, his cavalry crushing Athens’ Theban allies and his phalanx beating the Greek hoplites. Indeed, Philip did much to strengthen the Macedonia military during his reign, improving its phalanx and laying the foundation for the conquests of his son, Alexander III (336-323).

While Philip, after establishing Macedonian hegemony throughout Greece, turned his eye eastwards to Persia, it was left to his son to make that dream a reality. Alexander inherited his father’s battle-hardened army and went on to emerge as an even more accomplished general; in the course of a decade he toppled the Persian Empire, winning famous victories at the River Granicus, and then Issus and Gaugamela. His thirst for conquest pushed him to the borders of India before, finally, his army begged to return home. By the time of his death in the fabled ancient city of Babylon (aged just 32), Alexander’s empire comprised 2 million square miles.

Alexander the Great transformed Macedonia into the motherland of a vast empire through his conquests

Though Alexander had battled his way to near-mythic status, the vacuum he left could not be filled and his generals divided the provinces of his empire – which became known as the Successor states – and launched a 20-year struggle for control of the whole. Macedonia, of course, remained the heartland and most coveted prize, and Alexander’s regent in Europe, Antipater, and then his son Cassander, held the kingdom firm until the latter’s death in 297.

Further turmoil then gripped the kingdom until finally, Antigonus II Gonatas (277-239) brought the chaos to an end, defeating the encroaching Gauls and establishing a steady monarchy, the Antigonid dynasty, which ruled Macedonia until 168.

The Antigonids were to be the final ruling dynasty as the kings Philip V (221-179) and his son Perseus (179-168) clashed with the expanding military power of Rome. What became known as the Macedonian Wars unfolded as four separate conflicts, the first of which was fought as part of the Second Punic War between Rome and Carthage, and it ended favourably for Philip.

Philip’s belligerence then ignited a second war and this ended with his defeat as Cynoscephalae in 197 and the confiscation of the kingdom’s lands outside Macedonia. His son Perseus hoped to re-establish Macedonian influence but was defeated at Pydna in 168. Perseus was taken back to Rome in chains and Macedonia was split into four autonomous republics. In 152, a pretender son of Perseus, Andriscus, sought to restore the Macedonian monarchy, prompting the fourth and final war. His rebellion was crushed, however, and in 146 Macedonia’s fall from grace was complete when it became the first province of the newly-emerging Roman Empire.

Philip II of Macedon, king and father of Alexander the Great

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THE AMERICAS

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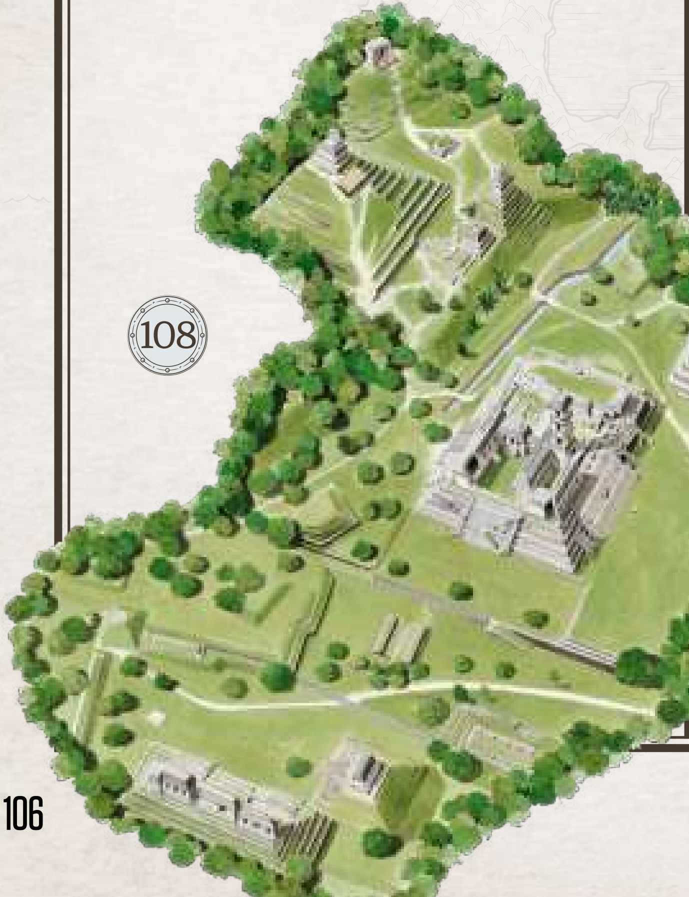

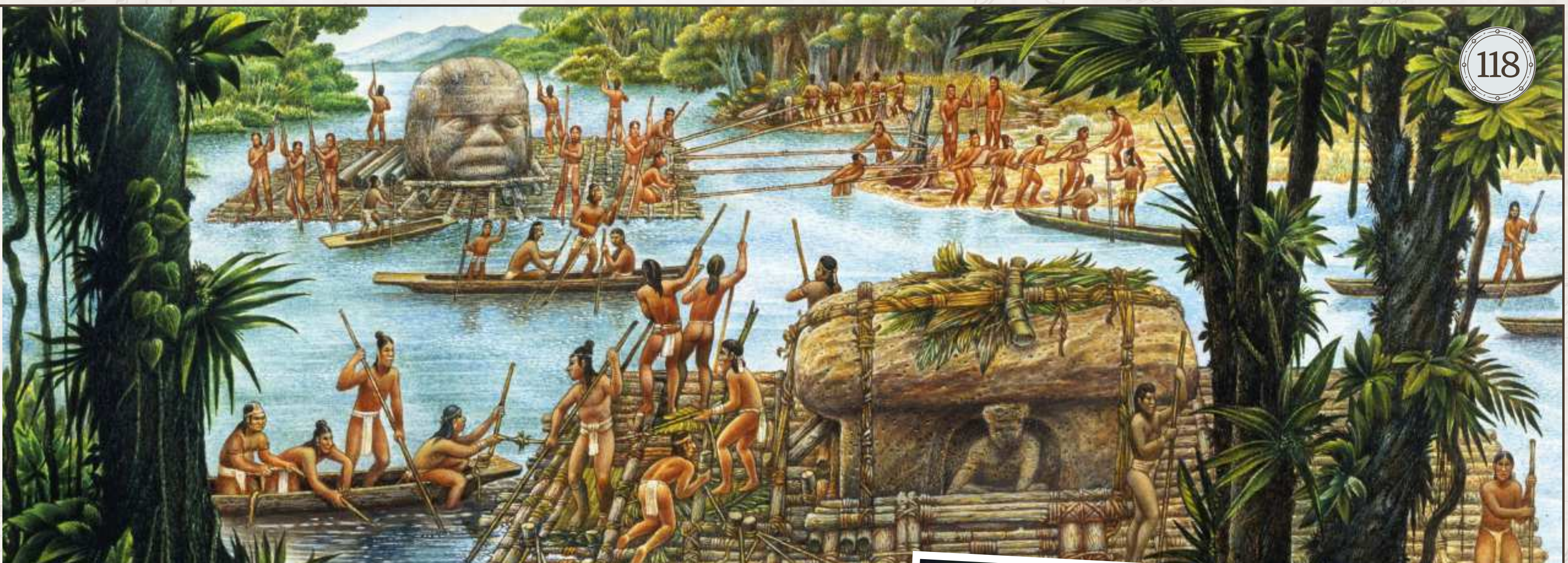
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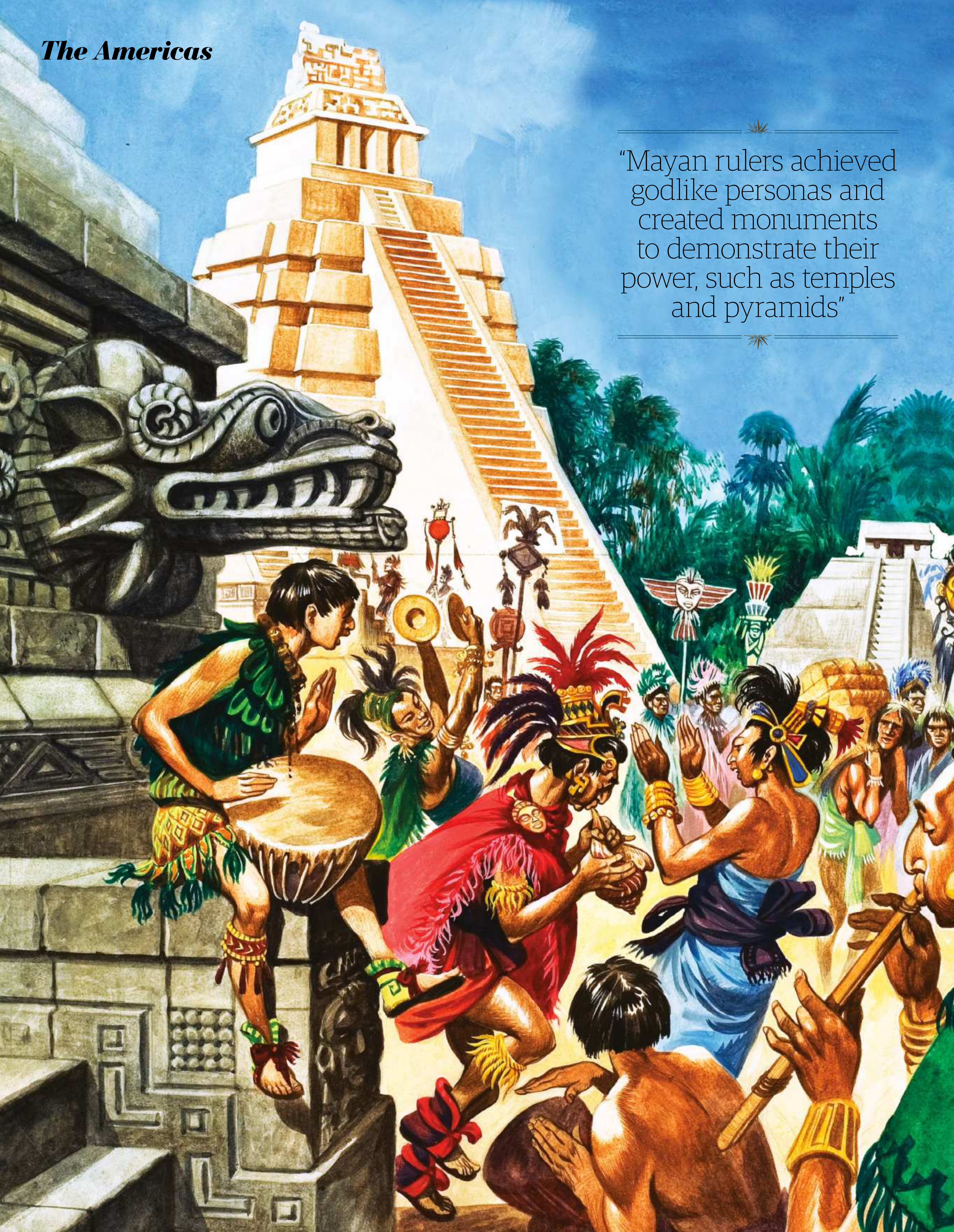


> “Mayan rulers achieved godlike personas and created monuments to demonstrate their power, such as temples and pyramids”

SECRETS OF THE MAYANS

Builders of mighty stone pyramids, expert astronomers and perpetrators of brutal human sacrifice, discover the amazing and shocking world of the Ancient Mayans

Written by Frances White

Deep in the hot and humid tropical jungles of Mesoamerica, an ancient and mysterious race of people thrive. Dressed in bark loincloths and grasping long spears crafted from volcanic rock, they appear at first glance to be a savage, backward people, but their sensitive and intellectual study of the stars, medicine and language hints otherwise. Spanning a period of thousands of years, their civilisation will create grand stone cities so mighty that they will outlive the rise and fall of nations. The mysticism surrounding them will grow so fervent that it will be capable of launching worldwide hysteria centuries later.

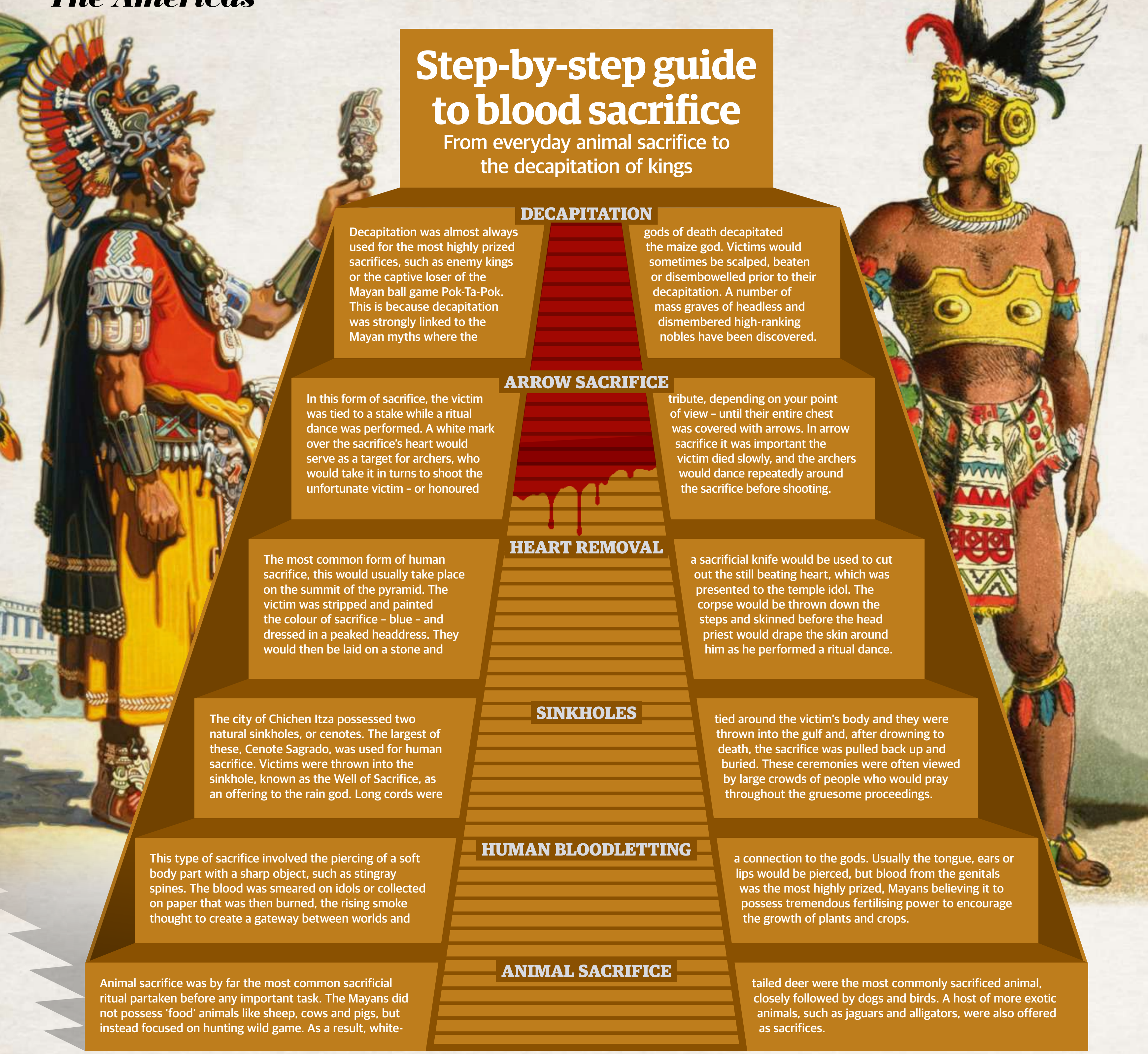
Creating a civilisation against all odds, the Mayans (also referred to as 'Maya') prospered in the harsh temperate deserts of southern Mexico and northern Central America. When the Spanish led their brutal and bloody conquest they destroyed many Mayan artefacts, so lots of their secrets were unfortunately burned to ashes. But they were unable to completely erase all trace of the Mayan society, and their great stone cities are a testament of their long-lasting resilience. To this day people remain intrigued, curious and inspired by this ancient civilisation and the mysticism surrounding it.

Centuries ahead of their time, the Mayans created the first written language of the pre-Columbian Americas, expertly predicted celestial events and developed a system of mathematics more advanced than the one used in Europe at the time. But they also engaged in brutal and bloody battles, spreading war to neighbouring territories, claiming prisoners and plunging knives through their chests atop their mighty step pyramids. Within the Ancient Mayan civilisation lays a collision of worlds – the sacrifices, ancient rituals of the past, the pursuit of knowledge and ingenious engineering of a more advanced age. Their herbal medical techniques are still being studied and practised today, while the breathtaking majesty of the city of Chichen Itza has been proclaimed one of the greatest wonders of the world. Perhaps we'll never know for sure who exactly these enigmatic people were, but due to recent discoveries of the messages they left behind, we are closer now than ever to unravelling the mysteries of the Mayans.

> The Mayans had an extensive trade network throughout Mexico and Central America, dealing with goods from clothing and weapons to gold

Step-by-step guide to blood sacrifice

From everyday animal sacrifice to the decapitation of kings



DECAPITATION

Decapitation was almost always used for the most highly prized sacrifices, such as enemy kings or the captive loser of the Mayan ball game Pok-Ta-Pok. This is because decapitation was strongly linked to the Mayan myths where the gods of death decapitated the maize god. Victims would sometimes be scalped, beaten or disembowelled prior to their decapitation. A number of mass graves of headless and dismembered high-ranking nobles have been discovered.

ARROW SACRIFICE

In this form of sacrifice, the victim was tied to a stake while a ritual dance was performed. A white mark over the sacrifice's heart would serve as a target for archers, who would take it in turns to shoot the unfortunate victim – or honoured tribute, depending on your point of view – until their entire chest was covered with arrows. In arrow sacrifice it was important the victim died slowly, and the archers would dance repeatedly around the sacrifice before shooting.

HEART REMOVAL

The most common form of human sacrifice, this would usually take place on the summit of the pyramid. The victim was stripped and painted the colour of sacrifice – blue – and dressed in a peaked headdress. They would then be laid on a stone and a sacrificial knife would be used to cut out the still beating heart, which was presented to the temple idol. The corpse would be thrown down the steps and skinned before the head priest would drape the skin around him as he performed a ritual dance.

SINKHOLES

The city of Chichen Itza possessed two natural sinkholes, or cenotes. The largest of these, Cenote Sagrado, was used for human sacrifice. Victims were thrown into the sinkhole, known as the Well of Sacrifice, as an offering to the rain god. Long cords were tied around the victim's body and they were thrown into the gulf and, after drowning to death, the sacrifice was pulled back up and buried. These ceremonies were often viewed by large crowds of people who would pray throughout the gruesome proceedings.

HUMAN BLOODLETTING

This type of sacrifice involved the piercing of a soft body part with a sharp object, such as stingray spines. The blood was smeared on idols or collected on paper that was then burned, the rising smoke thought to create a gateway between worlds and a connection to the gods. Usually the tongue, ears or lips would be pierced, but blood from the genitals was the most highly prized, Mayans believing it to possess tremendous fertilising power to encourage the growth of plants and crops.

ANIMAL SACRIFICE

Animal sacrifice was by far the most common sacrificial ritual partaken before any important task. The Mayans did not possess 'food' animals like sheep, cows and pigs, but instead focused on hunting wild game. As a result, white-tailed deer were the most commonly sacrificed animal, closely followed by dogs and birds. A host of more exotic animals, such as jaguars and alligators, were also offered as sacrifices.

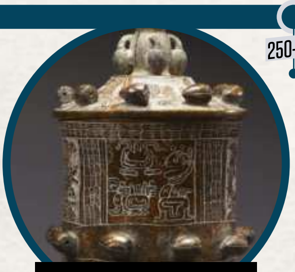
Timeline of a great civilisation

1800 BCE

The birth of a civilisation
Mayan settlements are established in the Soconusco region of the Pacific coast. Mayans create permanent communities and the first fired clay figures and pottery pieces are produced.

250 BCE – 100 CE

The preclassic era
In the Northern Mayan lowlands, smaller communities begin to develop, distinct from the large centres in the southern lowlands. The first Mayan hieroglyphics emerge in written inscriptions in stone around this time.



This earthenware lidded vessel is an example of Mayan art

250-800

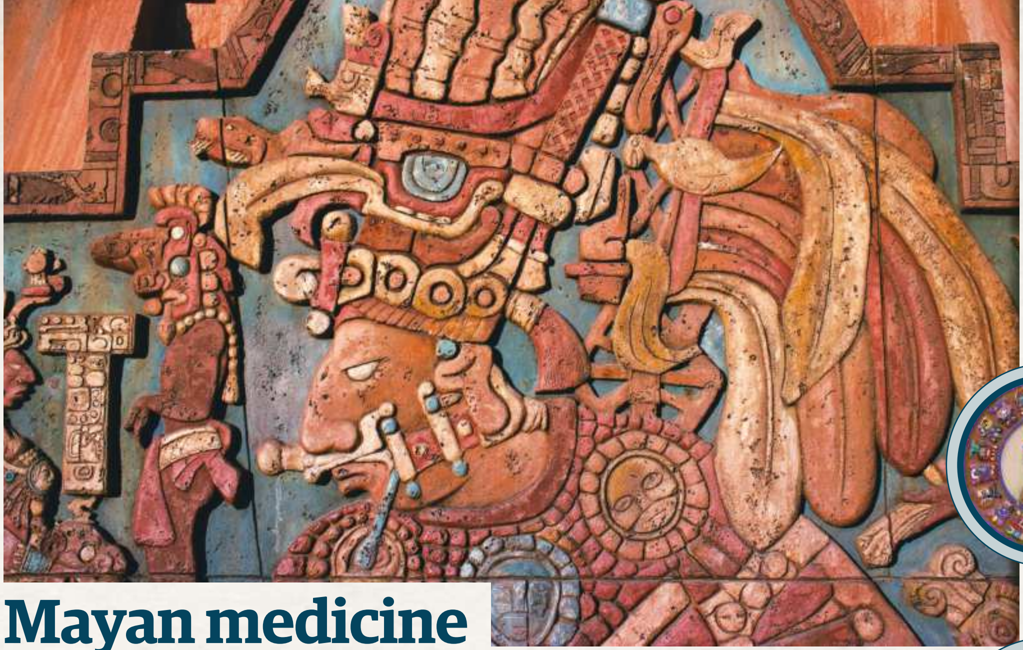
The mighty Mayans
Large-scale urbanism and construction occur, and powerful city-states emerge. The population increases to millions, and the political and economic networks steadily expand throughout the wider Mesoamerican world.

800-900

Widespread collapse
Major cities in the southern lowlands fall into decline and are abandoned. The origins of this event, known as the classic Mayan collapse, remain a mystery, with various theories such as drought, warfare or an ecological disaster suggested.

1000-1500

The north lives on
The northern cities thrive, building highways to increase trade. After the decline of the cities of Chichen and Uxmal, Mayapan rules over much of the territory until a revolt in 1450. Small pockets of southern states slowly reconstruct.



Mayan medicine

The surprisingly sophisticated practices of Mayan medicine men

TOOTHACHE

Remedy: Mayans were very skilled in dentistry, and fake teeth were made from jade and turquoise if the patient could afford it. If a filling was required, iron pyrite ('fool's gold') was used. There was also a trend in dental decoration where the teeth were filed into points, ground into rectangles and drilled with holes. The holes would then be filled with jade or iron pyrite to produce a pattern on them.

PAIN

Remedy: Pain was often treated by putting the patient into a trance-like state, using mind-altering substances commonly utilised in rituals. Flowers, mushrooms, tobacco and plants used to make alcoholic substances were collected and usually smoked. If required, a ritual enema could be used for rapid absorption and immediate pain relief.

POISONOUS STINGS

Remedy: Sweat baths, or temazcal, were used to encourage the patient to sweat out and expel impurities from their body. They were also used for ailments such as rheumatism, fevers, weariness after battle or for women who had just given birth. The hot steam was thought to help in purifying and restoring the body for a long, healthy life.

PRAY THAT YOU DIDN'T GET... SMALLPOX

When the Spanish began their conquest of the Mayans, they brought with them diseases previously unseen by the skilled medicine men, such as influenza, measles and tuberculosis. But it was a plague of smallpox that devastated the civilisation, killing as many as 90 per cent of the native population in a century. Up against a rapidly spreading disease on a scale previously unfathomable, the natural herbal remedies of the Mayans didn't stand a chance.

MAIN PRINCIPLES

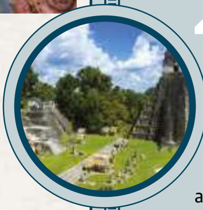
Mayan medicine focused on the concept of life force and the idea that this force can be directed to where it is needed. It was a healer's job to balance this life force, which binds everything together. As this life energy also ran through plants, a lot of Mayan healing was focused on the use of flora. The blood determined the health of the body so the pulse was a key tool in working out the nature of the illness. Diseases were also classified as either 'hot' or 'cold', and hot foods such as onions and ginger would be used to treat cold illnesses and vice versa.

> Mayan doctors had their own specialities, from bone setting to childbirth, and were called upon depending on the patient's needs

5 reasons the Mayans were ahead of their time

1 Astronomy

The Mayans were highly skilled in astronomy and developed an incredibly accurate calendar. The Mayan calendar featured a complicated arrangement of interlocking circles, capable of keeping time to a degree even more accurate than the calendar we use today. They were also able to predict the positions of celestial objects precisely, despite their lack of any specialised equipment.



2 Architecture

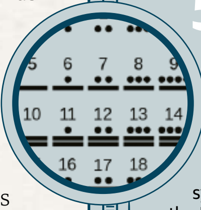
More than 4,400 Mayan sites have been documented with architecture spanning thousands of years. The gigantic La Danta pyramid covers 18.2 square kilometres with a height of 70 metres, making it one of the largest pyramids in the world by volume. It is largely because of the long-lasting nature of these buildings that we know so much about the Mayans.

3 Artwork

Archaeologists have unearthed an abundance of detailed Mayan artwork including massive stone sculptures, wood carvings, narrative paintings and delicate ceramics. Most remarkable of all are the objects created from thick, dense materials such as jade and obsidian as, unlike the Incas, the Mayans did not have any metal tools. Their artwork often features Maya blue, a bright azure pigment that remains as vibrant today as the day it was painted. The techniques behind this mysterious substance have not been discovered.

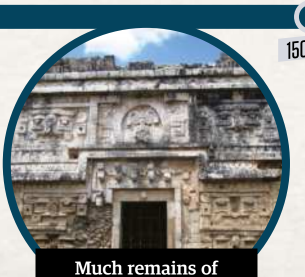
4 Writing

Mayan script was a writing system comprising of hieroglyphs, and they were the only civilisation in Mesoamerica with a complete writing system. The earliest Mayan inscriptions date back to the 3rd century BCE, cementing them as the inventors of writing in their region. The complex writing system uses a combination of 800 glyphs to represent words, and it is the only Mesoamerican writing system that has been substantially deciphered.



5 Maths

This great civilisation created one of the most advanced mathematical and numeric systems in the world at the time. This sophisticated number system allowed them to write very large numbers by utilising just three symbols, a dot, bar and shell shape. The Mayans also developed the concept of zero as early as 36 BCE and produced a symbol for it, while Europeans were still using the Roman numeral system.



Much remains of the city of Chichen Itza, one of the seven wonders of the world

1502-29

The Spanish conquest begins

Christopher Columbus arrives in Guanaja and discovers a Mayan settlement. The Europeans loot what they can carry and capture Mayans as slaves. News of his discovery travels and more Spanish explorers journey to Mayan lands, bringing Old World diseases such as smallpox, influenza and measles.

1528-30

The Mayans fight back

Led by Francisco de Montejo, the Spanish begin their conquest of the Mayan territories in the northern region. However, the Mayans are not so easily toppled and fight back with surprising strength, leading to the conquest dragging on over several bloody years.

1540-47

Continuing conquest

The Spanish conquest continues and in 1541 the first Spanish town council is established in the Yucatán Peninsula. Many Mayan lords submit to the might of the Spanish crown, but eastern provinces resist Spanish rule. The rebellious eastern Mayans are finally defeated in battle and hundreds are killed.

1618-97

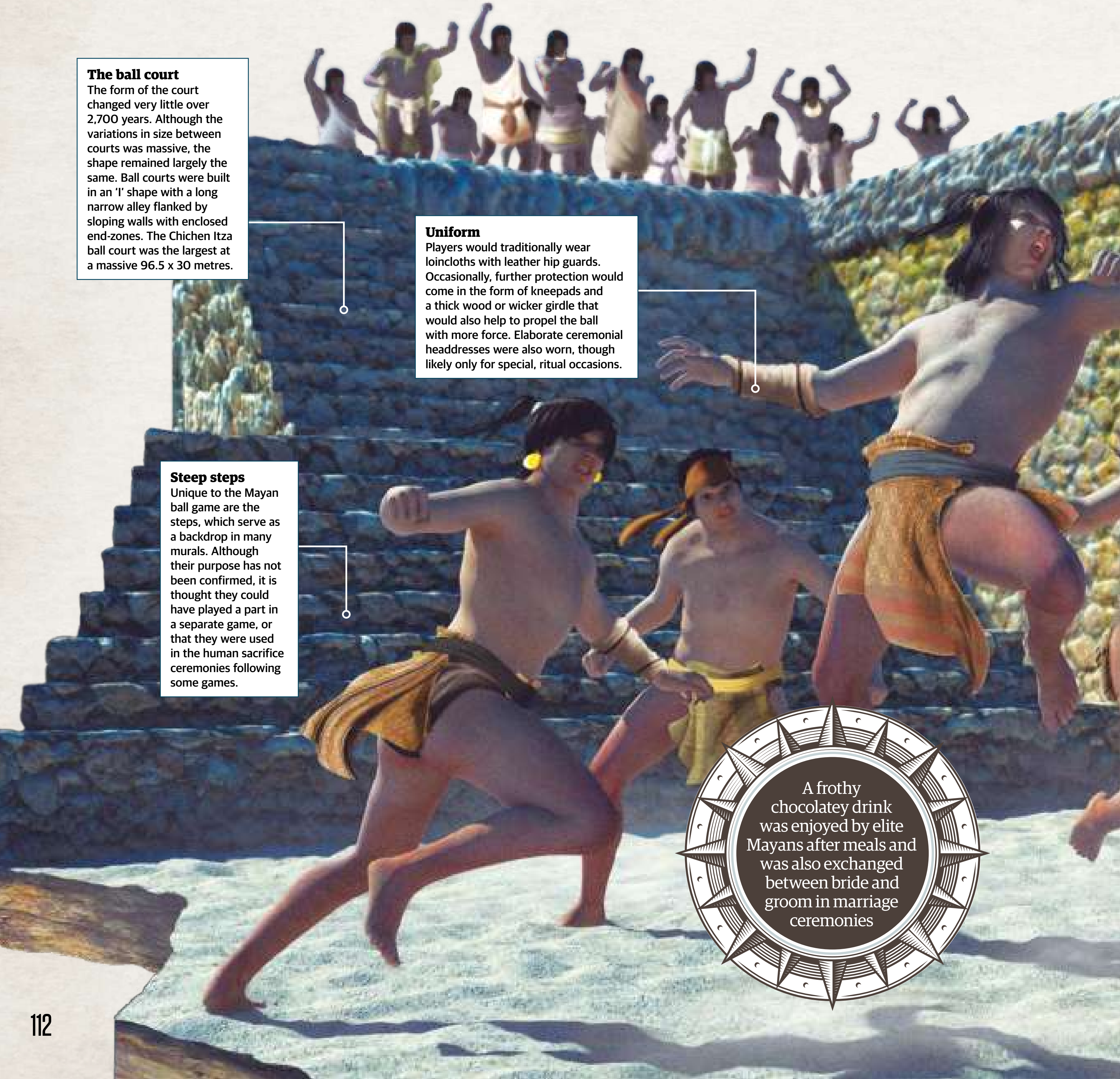
The final collapse

The last stage of the Spanish conquest takes place in the Péten Basin. In 1618, Spanish missionaries arrive at the Itza capital and they are followed in 1622 by a military expedition. The Mayans massacre the invaders but by 1697 the Mayan kingdoms are incorporated into the Spanish Empire.

Pok-Ta-Pok

An ancient game of life and death

A common feature of many Mayan towns were the great masonry structures used to host grand feasts, conduct rituals and display wrestling matches. However, their primary purpose and most popular attraction was the deadly Mayan ball game of Pok-Ta-Pok. As the ancient game was played, the stone slabs transformed into a battleground, a sacred place, a portal between this world and the one beyond. Two opposing teams would face each other with the aim of keeping the ball in play and, for an instant win, directing the ball through a high mounted vertical hoop. The players could only use their hips, shoulders, head and knees as the use of feet or hands was forbidden. Players would dash around the court with lighting-quick speed in an attempt to lead their team to victory, as a single wrong move could mean the difference between life and death.

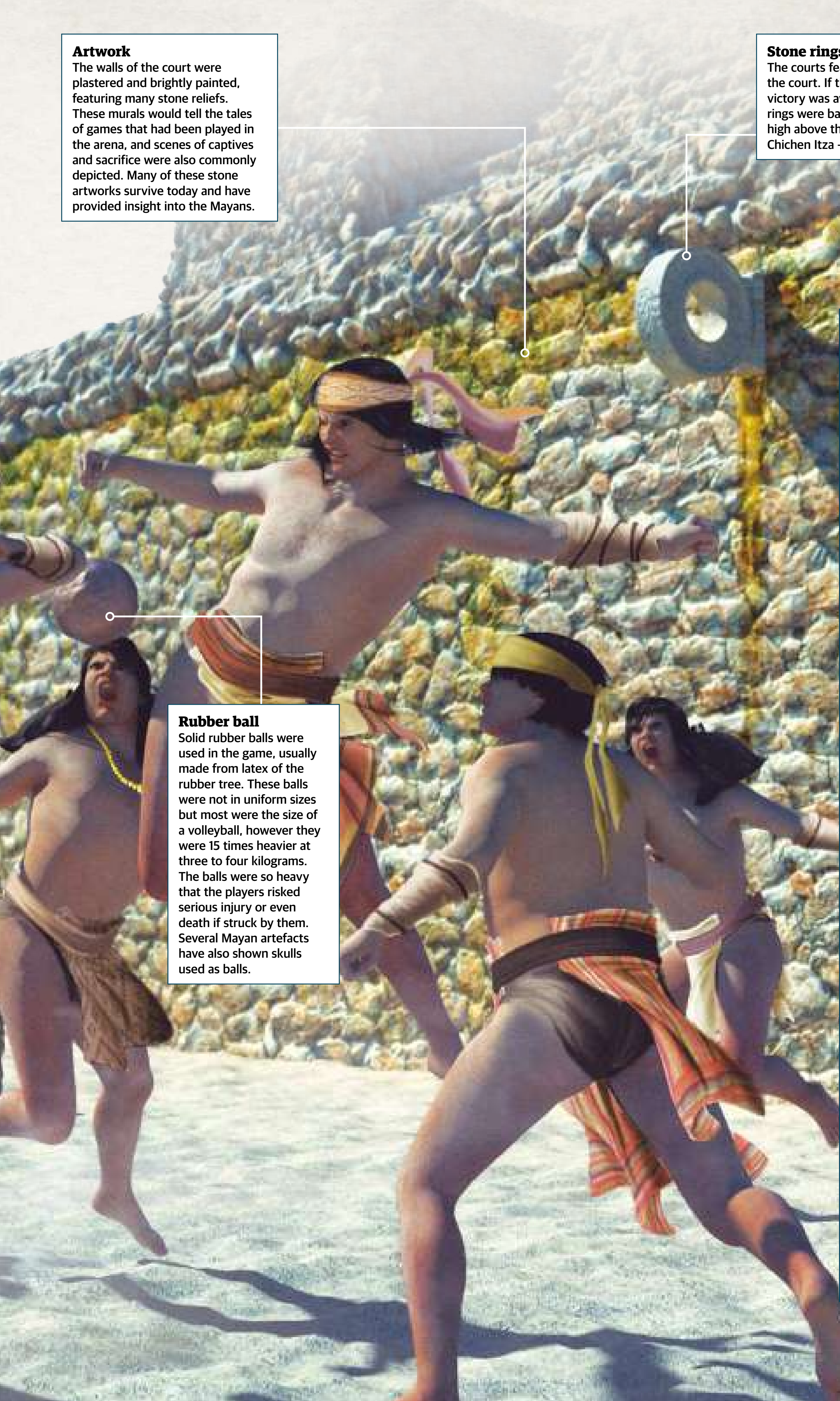


The ball court
The form of the court changed very little over 2,700 years. Although the variations in size between courts was massive, the shape remained largely the same. Ball courts were built in an 'I' shape with a long narrow alley flanked by sloping walls with enclosed end-zones. The Chichen Itza ball court was the largest at a massive 96.5 x 30 metres.

Uniform
Players would traditionally wear loincloths with leather hip guards. Occasionally, further protection would come in the form of kneepads and a thick wood or wicker girdle that would also help to propel the ball with more force. Elaborate ceremonial headdresses were also worn, though likely only for special, ritual occasions.

Steep steps
Unique to the Mayan ball game are the steps, which serve as a backdrop in many murals. Although their purpose has not been confirmed, it is thought they could have played a part in a separate game, or that they were used in the human sacrifice ceremonies following some games.

A frothy chocolatey drink was enjoyed by elite Mayans after meals and was also exchanged between bride and groom in marriage ceremonies



Artwork
The walls of the court were plastered and brightly painted, featuring many stone reliefs. These murals would tell the tales of games that had been played in the arena, and scenes of captives and sacrifice were also commonly depicted. Many of these stone artworks survive today and have provided insight into the Mayans.

Stone rings
The courts featured vertical stone rings on each side of the court. If the ball passed through the ring, a decisive victory was awarded to the scoring team. However, as the rings were barely bigger than the ball in play and were set high above the playing field – for example six metres at Chichen Itza – this was a rare event.

Rubber ball
Solid rubber balls were used in the game, usually made from latex of the rubber tree. These balls were not in uniform sizes but most were the size of a volleyball, however they were 15 times heavier at three to four kilograms. The balls were so heavy that the players risked serious injury or even death if struck by them. Several Mayan artefacts have also shown skulls used as balls.

A matter of life and death

Pok-Ta-Pok's origins were rooted in the symbolism and myth that defined much of the Mayan society. The myth surrounding the game tells the tale of the hero twins who defeated the lords of death in the ball game and tricked them into decapitating themselves. The game told the story of the journey between life and death, and it was revered so highly that it was used to settle disputes within society. At times the game was used a means to defuse conflicts to avoid warfare, with kings playing against kings for domination, waging their battles on the ball court.

Sacrifice was an important and revered aspect of the ball game and is depicted on the glyphs of many ball courts. Sometimes captives would be bound and forced to play a rigged ball game they could not win, after which the loser would be beheaded. However, practiced players were also sacrificed, and there is evidence to suggest that it was sometimes the winning team or captain who were chosen. The idea of a quick death and instant passage to paradise was regarded as an honour. However, sacrifice did not take place in every game, as star teams existed. It is likely that there were two versions of the game, one played as a sport with betting involved, and another as a sacred re-enactment of the mythical story complete with human sacrifice.

A ball-court mural depicting a scene of human sacrifice

3 Mayan myths examined

THEY PROPHESIED THE END OF THE WORLD

👍 Experts analysed the Mesoamerican long count calendar, used by the Mayans, by using ancient inscriptions. The calendar foretold that the end of the cycle would fall on 21 December 2012. In the Mayan calendar this represented the end of the 'fourth world', ushering forth a large worldwide change, something that would change the face of the Earth forever.

👎 Although it is correct that the end of the cycle was a major event for the Mayans, this would be cause for celebration, rather than concern. This also didn't mark the end of the calendar, there would simply be another cycle after that one, after all, there was a cycle before the one in question. Additional calendars were also found that prove the Maya believed the world would continue for at least another 7,000 years.

Conclusion: FALSE
There is no evidence of this doomsday theory anywhere in Mayan texts, and it demonstrates a misunderstanding of Maya history and culture.

THEY DIDN'T DEVELOP IN MEXICO

👍 It is highly unlikely that an ancient civilisation could have prospered in the seasonal desert the Mayans are believed to. Other ancient civilisations in Egypt, China and Mesopotamia all developed along rivers, with access to stable sources of drinking water. It is therefore more reasonable to assume that the Mayans developed elsewhere and then reached the tropical lowlands toward the end of their history.

👎 It is true that the Maya civilisation is thought to have prospered in unusual territory - a seasonal desert without a stable source of water, but to deny their ability to do this is to ignore their remarkable accomplishments. The Maya created an ingenious system of storing water based on rainfall and also engineered the first water pressure system. Additionally, there is evidence from archaeological excavations that the Maya developed many skilful methods of dealing with their harsh environment.

Conclusion: FALSE
There's no evidence to back up this myth - countless archaeological finds place the Maya firmly in the Mexican lowlands for thousands of years.

THEY WERE A PEACEFUL PEOPLE

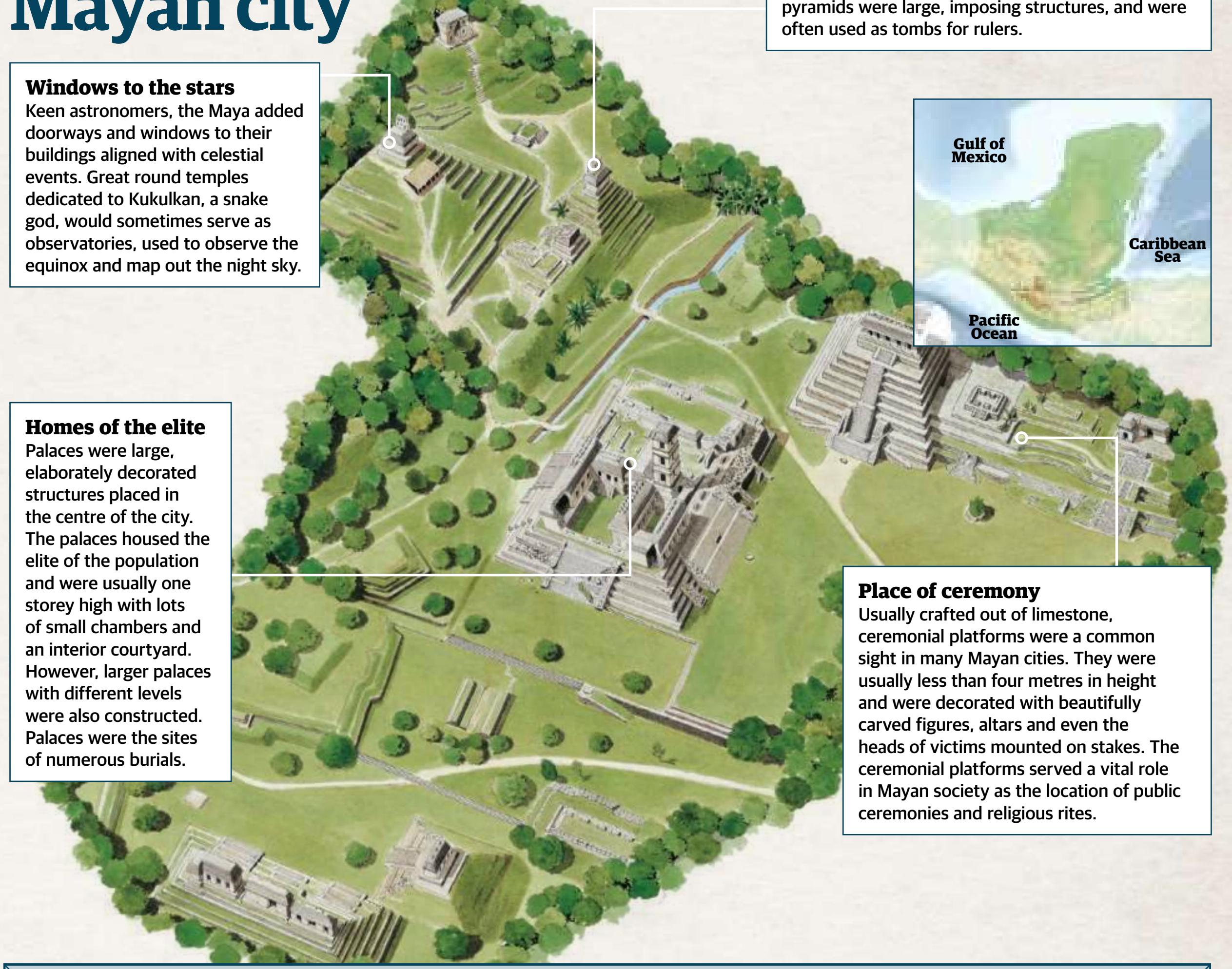
👍 The Maya were an incredibly developed society for their time. They were primarily concerned with intellectual pursuits such as astronomy, mathematics and writing. They believed in a life force that unites all things and had great respect and faith in the power of nature, with healing practices that demonstrated this. The Maya also lived in dispersed, self-sufficient city-states with strong focus on agriculture.

👎 Recent discoveries and newly deciphered writings show a very different side to the pacifists the Maya were once believed to be, indicating they often fought and warred between themselves. The individual rulers of the city-states were eager to expand their territory and they would do this through war and bloodshed. Fortified defences and artistic depictions of war as well as the discovery of weapons all contribute to the theory that the Maya were regularly involved in violent warfare.

Conclusion: FALSE
The Mayans were not any different to the great majority of ancient civilisations, and war was the driving force for much of their cultural change.

Crossed eyes were regarded as beautiful, so Mayan parents would dangle objects before their children's eyes to permanently cross them

Layout of a typical Mayan city



Windows to the stars
Keen astronomers, the Maya added doorways and windows to their buildings aligned with celestial events. Great round temples dedicated to Kukulkan, a snake god, would sometimes serve as observatories, used to observe the equinox and map out the night sky.

Steps to the gods
Arguably the most famous Mayan structures, the pyramids were huge structures featuring steep steps of carved stone. At over 60m (200ft) tall, the pyramids were large, imposing structures, and were often used as tombs for rulers.

Homes of the elite
Palaces were large, elaborately decorated structures placed in the centre of the city. The palaces housed the elite of the population and were usually one storey high with lots of small chambers and an interior courtyard. However, larger palaces with different levels were also constructed. Palaces were the sites of numerous burials.

Place of ceremony
Usually crafted out of limestone, ceremonial platforms were a common sight in many Mayan cities. They were usually less than four metres in height and were decorated with beautifully carved figures, altars and even the heads of victims mounted on stakes. The ceremonial platforms served a vital role in Mayan society as the location of public ceremonies and religious rites.

The final mystery

What happened to the Mayans?

In 800, the Mayan Empire was at its peak, its city-states spread from southern Mexico to northern Honduras, and millions of citizens worshiped and prospered in their towns. However, just 100 years later, all that remained of the magnificent cities were ruins, and the people had fled en masse. This has led some researchers to believe the cities were plagued by a sudden catastrophic event such as an earthquake or volcanic eruption, but due to the length of time of the decline, this is doubtful.

The theory of modern invasion or war also seems unlikely to account for the mass collapse that occurred. More likely is the sudden introduction of a devastating infectious illness that tore through the population. But the most popular theory is that the civilisation was hit by a severe drought. Highly reliant on rainfall and hunting, an environmental disaster such as this would have proved catastrophic to the Mayans. However, there has been no definite proof for any theory, so the Mayan collapse remains one of history's biggest unsolved mysteries.

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The Quimbaya Civilisation

The possibly cannibalistic Quimbaya people lived in the Cauca River valley in what is now west Colombia during the first millennium until a sudden collapse during the 10th century. Best known for their exquisite gold figurines of seated men and women with closed eyes and a serene expression, the Quimbaya placed the statuettes and other gold pieces in graves as funerary offerings.

THE OLMECS

Meet the first great Mesoamerican civilisation that left behind remarkable sculptures and a lasting legacy across the region

Written by James Price

Mesoamerica's first major sophisticated civilisation was one that disappeared from human knowledge for nearly 1,500 years. It was only in the mid 19th century that the Olmecs shot into historians' consciousness when a scholar named José Melgar y Serrano came across a rural ranch in the humid, tropical Mexican lowlands and reported the monumental discovery of a colossal stone head that had lain there for over a millennium, buried and forgotten.

Melgar wrote of the discovery: "A farm worker was clearing a corn field on the Hacienda Hueyapan in southern Veracruz state, Mexico. As he hacked at the forest, he came upon what he thought was the bottom of an overturned cauldron, partly buried in the ground. Ordered by the hacienda owner to retrieve the cauldron, he returned and began to dig. To his surprise, his labours were rewarded not by the rim of an iron vessel, but by the baleful stare of a great head carved in volcanic stone."

The imposing cabeza colosal de Hueyapan, with its distinctive features and sheer size, amazed Mexico – and later the world – and drove future historians and archaeologists to investigate the mysterious people who had created this monumental head. Much is still unknown about the people who made this and the other stone heads that were later discovered in the region, but historians have managed to piece together more and more information about a civilisation that existed for at least 800 years and whose influence could still be felt in subsequent civilisations in Mesoamerica right up until the Spanish conquests in the 1500s.

While it is difficult to piece together a chronology and distinguish contemporary civilisations that lived in close proximity, traded and left no discernible writings, it is believed that the Olmec civilisation existed from around 1200 to 400 BCE. The Olmec heartland comprised the Mexican lowlands of modern Veracruz and Tabasco states. The heartlands were small – "about 18,130 square kilometres (roughly 7,000 square miles) … along the Gulf Coast and centring on the volcanic uplift called the Tuxtlas Mountains," according to historian Richard EW Adams.

The hot, humid, swampy and thoroughly moist lowlands were frequently "drowned by heavy rainfall and the annual flooding of the great rivers". But all this meant that the region was extremely fertile, so – like the Indus Valley and the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia – it is perhaps not a surprise that this was the setting for the growth of a major sophisticated civilisation.

The Olmecs developed agriculture, but the land offered up plentiful resources such as fish, wild fruits, berries and other plants, and the Olmecs probably didn't rely too heavily on agriculture for sustenance. They also had no herd animals that could be domesticated, so the hunting traditions that had existed for thousands of years were continued by the Olmecs.

It is believed that the Olmec civilisation existed from around 1200 to 400 BCE

The term 'Olmec' was first recorded by one of the early Europeans in the region, the Spanish monk Bernardino de Sahagún, in his *Florentine Codex* in 1569. Recording Aztec customs and beliefs in the codex, Sahagún recorded the word 'Olmecatl' from Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, roughly meaning 'people of the rubber land' in reference to the lowlands region the Olmecs had inhabited 1,000 years earlier.

It is unlikely the Olmecs rose far above other civilisations in the region in isolation, and it is probable that trade and mutual influence helped spur on the Olmecs' growth. The setting for the Olmecs' rise was the city of San Lorenzo, which resided on a plateau. This high ground, perhaps even more than the colossal heads, is a significant sign of the advancement of the civilisation as it was heavily modified, extended and filled in by the Olmecs, and demanded a huge amount of organisation and cohesion to achieve. Adams reports that it "may have involved the piling up of the stupendous amount of over 2.13 million cubic metres (75 million cubic feet) of material.

The colossal stone heads of the Olmec are a bold statement of power and advancement. The heads likely depict Olmec rulers

> “Much is still unknown about the people who made this and the other stone heads later discovered”

This work [was] clearly beyond the capacity for organisation or labour of an ordinary village or even group of villages," and he notes that it is a clear sign of social development, and something far beyond the capabilities of other contemporary villages and civilisations.

San Lorenzo was established in around 1200 BCE. The site included several large stone heads and carvings, altars, man-made mounds, open plazas and probably a drainage system and ball court. Being the 'land of rubber', the famous Mesoamerican ball game was likely played here where two teams threw or hit a solid rubber ball between them. Olmec statues depict ballplayers, and even the colossal heads suggest the game was played and was symbolically important – the helmets they were carved wearing are often believed to be those worn during ball games rather than in battle.

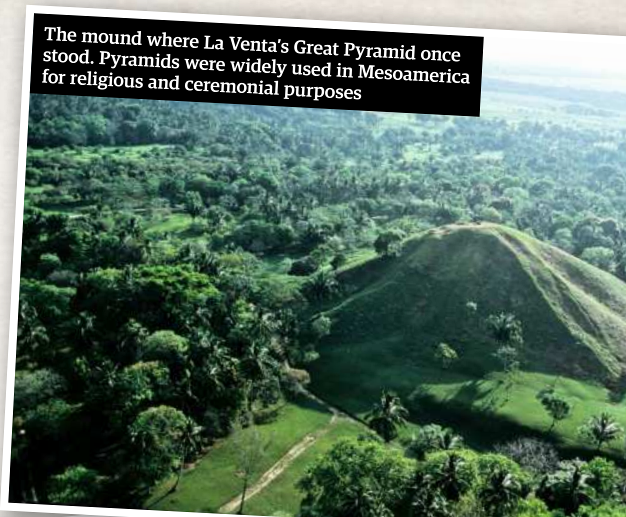
The social structure that existed in San Lorenzo is not known for certain, although it is often believed that the city was ruled by a chief and featured a social elite class and lower ranks, broken into castes according to their occupations. The population was perhaps 1,000, although populations from this time (and after) are difficult to define.

Despite its rise, in around 900 BCE San Lorenzo tumbled into terminal decline, and many of its statues and monuments were damaged or destroyed. Whether through invasion, migration or internal social tension – perhaps driven by famine or factional divisions – San Lorenzo was eventually abandoned.

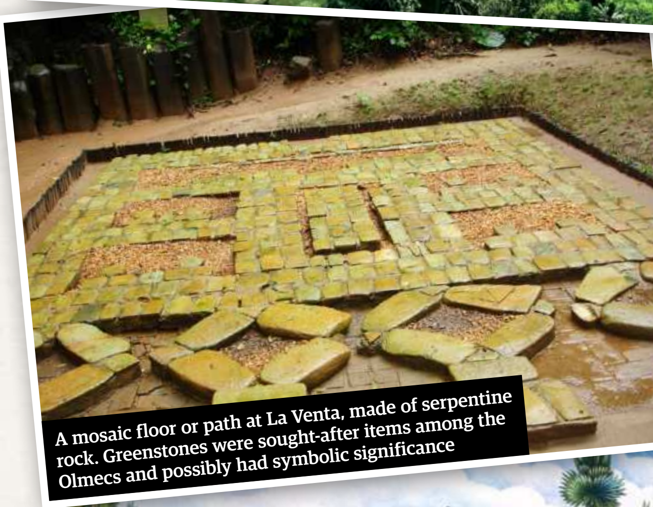
However, other Olmec sites continued – principally in Tres Zapotes (where cabeza colosal de Hueyapan was discovered), Laguna de los Cerros and, most notably, in La Venta. Located on an island close to the modern state border between Veracruz and Tabasco and home to farming villages from as early as 2200 BCE, La Venta grew and thrived at the same moment that San Lorenzo foundered, becoming the most important city in Mesoamerica. There is evidence that La Venta included religious complexes, basalt columns, ritual sites and jade mosaics, as well as a 30-metre-tall pyramid structure, revealing an increasingly complex society.

La Venta was carefully laid out: the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York states that "the ceremonial heart of La Venta was aligned to eight degrees west of north, probably for astronomical reasons". The layout of buildings was symmetrical, running north to south, and further colossal heads were located at key points. It has been suggested by some historians that La Venta was a site of pilgrimage and actually had a low

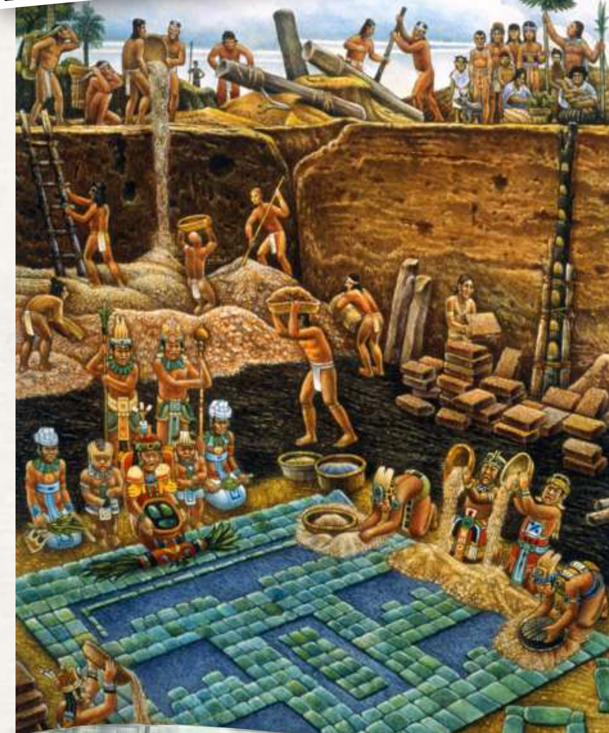
> The setting for the Olmecs' rise was the city of San Lorenzo, which resided on a plateau

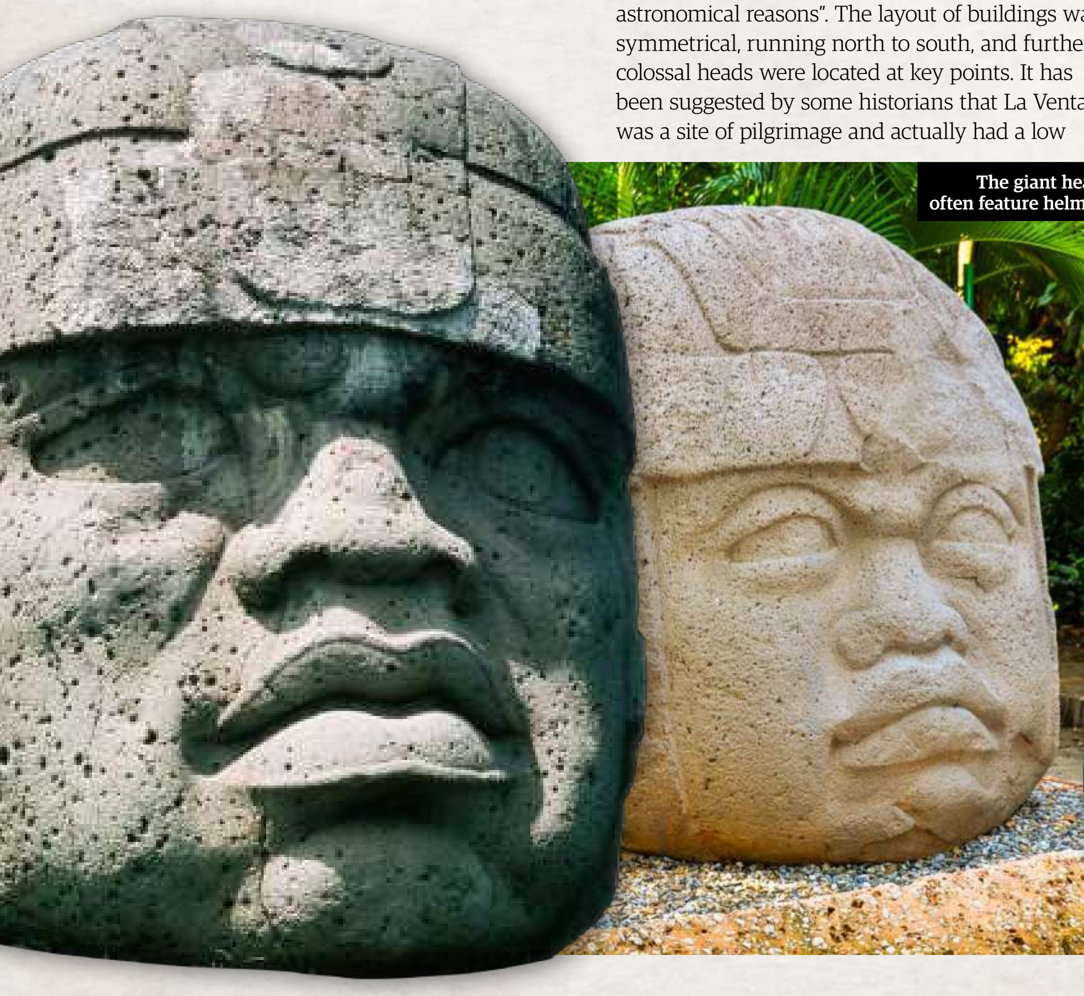


The mound where La Venta's Great Pyramid once stood. Pyramids were widely used in Mesoamerica for religious and ceremonial purposes

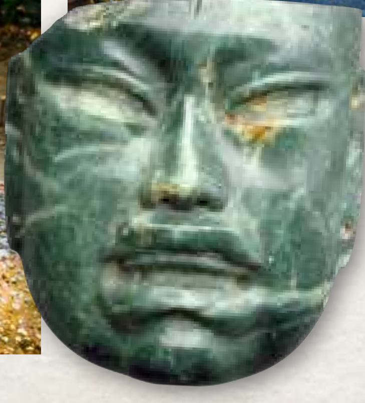


A mosaic floor or path at La Venta, made of serpentine rock. Greenstones were sought-after items among the Olmecs and possibly had symbolic significance

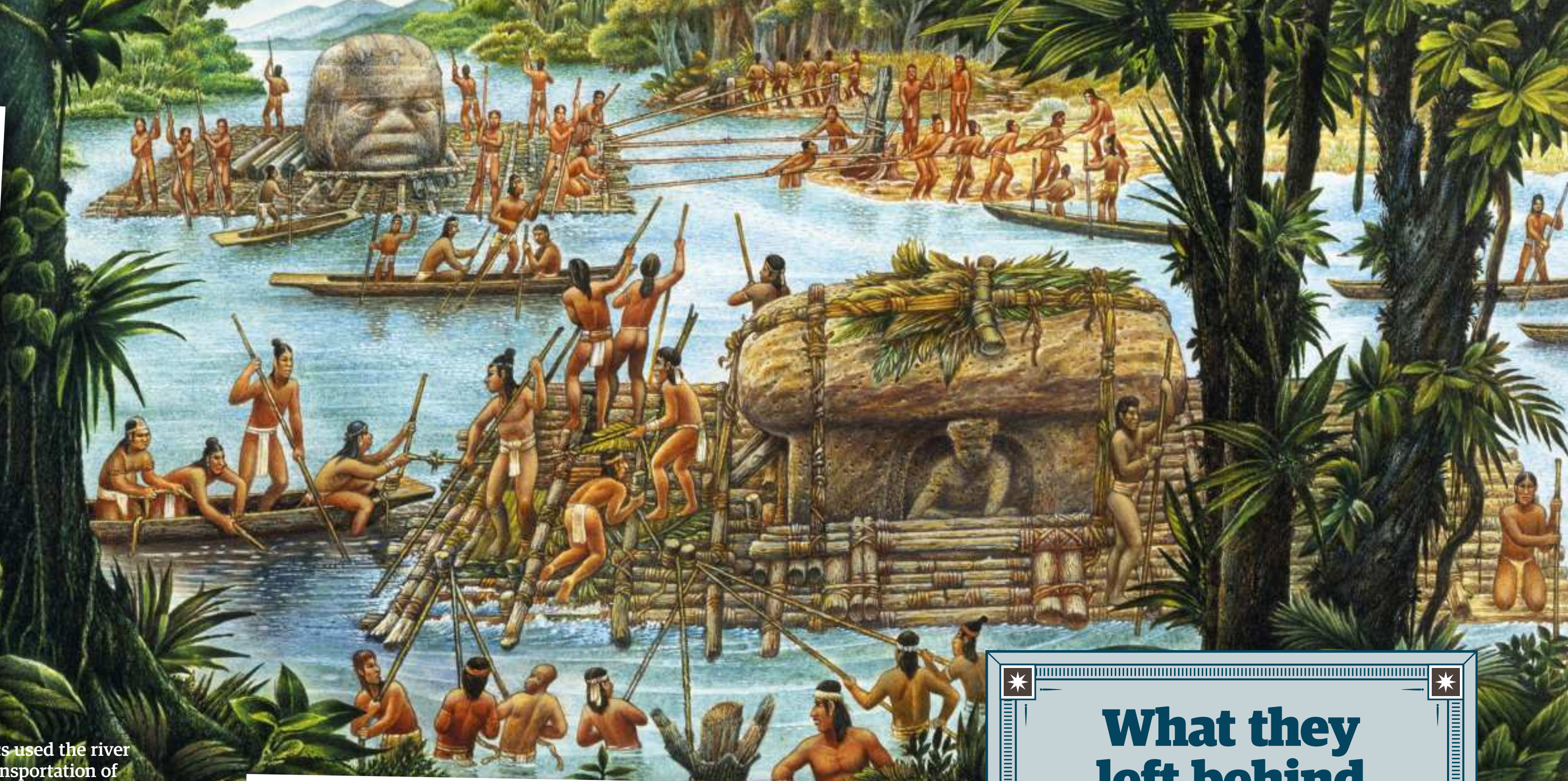




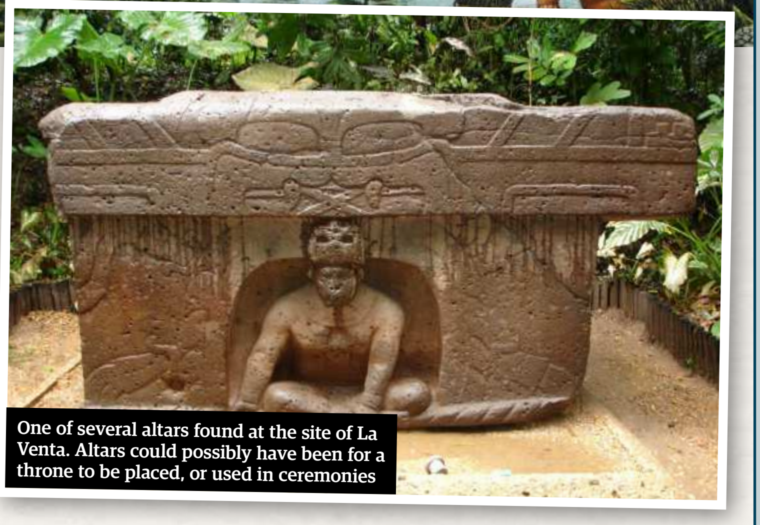
The giant heads often feature helmets



The jadeite in this mask from 900-400 BCE likely originated from the Motagua River valley in Guatemala, "the only known source of jadeite in ancient Mesoamerica" according to the Met Museum in New York



Olmecs used the river for transportation of sculptures and other goods



One of several altars found at the site of La Venta. Altars could possibly have been for a throne to be placed, or used in ceremonies

population, although it is an area of debate.

Whether or not La Venta was a site of pilgrimage, the evidence suggests that religion was a major part of Olmec life. The Olmecs most likely believed in multiple deities, but the prevalence of depictions of one particular figure suggests it is the most important: the were-jaguar. The many sculptures and carvings of this creature present a jaguar morphed with a human, often a child. The jaguar was a hugely significant and symbolic creature across Mesoamerica, and following civilisations – most notably the Mayans and Aztecs – attributed power, prestige and other-worldly forces with the fearsome felines.

It is widely believed that other aspects of nature were deified too – a god of maize and a serpent god being two examples. The latter is possibly an example of the expansion of the Olmec pantheon of deities and was adopted around 900 BCE, according to Adams. Other deified creatures included sharks and eagles.

Much of what is known about the Olmecs is based on the wondrous examples of art that have survived. The colossal heads, the most distinctive expression of the Olmecs, are impressive feats of labour and art. The heaviest weighed up to 40 tons, and they were, according to historian Christopher Pool, dragged up to 70 kilometres through swamps and streams to be carved and placed at important junctions in the city or beside large stone altars. The effort required to move them “attests to the exceptional power of the rulers who commissioned them”, Pool suggests. The faces are most likely of the rulers themselves – an example of art as an expression of dynastic power.

Art also occurred on a smaller scale. Numerous examples exist of small stone, wood and basalt carvings of people, animals and deities. Greenstones, in particular jade, were also highly prized and used for statues, exquisite masks and jewellery. Much of the greenstone was imported, serving as an example of the precocious trade links the Olmecs established across the region. Ceramic was utilised for art too, making pottery and also ceramic hollow ‘baby’ figurines, while iron ore was utilised to make mirrors and small pieces of mirror for necklaces.

The artistic expressions of the Olmecs were imported, adopted and imitated across Mesoamerica, and it is one of their most defining features as a great civilisation. As artistic expressions like these required a huge amount of skill, served little material purpose and were wanted exclusively by an elite, they serve to demonstrate how developed Olmec society had become, while also confirming the presence of an elite within their society.

Around 400 BCE, La Venta, too, fell into decline. Within decades it was abandoned, bringing the Olmecs’ time to an end. It is unclear what brought about the end of this great civilisation, although suggestions include serious and prolonged poor weather, over-farming, the drying up of rivers or even volcanic activity driving the Olmecs to seek new pastures. Whatever the cause, the Olmecs disappeared, until their monumental artworks began to emerge from the Mexican jungle many centuries later.

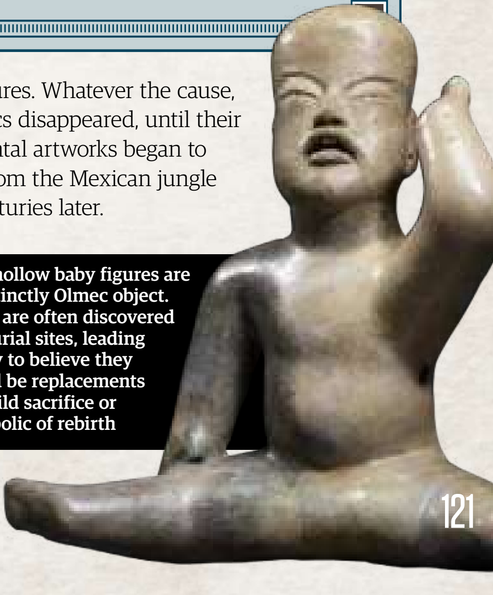
What they left behind

While lost to history for so long, the Olmecs continued to have their existence felt in the civilisations that followed

Just how much the Olmecs influenced Mesoamerican culture is heavily debated: as a culture that established extensive trade routes, the two-way exchange of ideas was almost unavoidable. And with the evident success of the Olmecs, it is likely that their contemporaries, whether freely or through coercion, adopted some Olmec traits.

Religious characteristics, such as the reverence shown to jaguars, the figure of a feathered serpent, as well as the neatly aligned cities and the construction of pyramids, were all popularised by the Olmecs – whether they were the original creators of these practices or not. These attributes can be seen in the Zapotecs, Mayans and even the Aztecs over a millennium later. Similarly, ball games that were at least very similar to the one the Olmecs played were widely adopted – and are even played today in some parts.

Olmec influence on Mesoamerican religion, culture, the city skyline and rituals continued in one form or another right up until the moment the Old World, in the form of Spanish conquistadors, turned up and turned life in Mesoamerica upside down in 1521 and the rest of the 16th century.



The hollow baby figures are a distinctly Olmec object. They are often discovered by burial sites, leading many to believe they could be replacements to child sacrifice or symbolic of rebirth

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The Chavín Culture

Flourishing between 900 and 200 BCE, the Chavín Culture was the earliest highly developed civilisation in pre-Columbian Peru. It saw the local cultures of the area come together for the first time to be unified by a common ideology or religion, and boasted a population of 2,000-3,000 people at its peak, with a territory of about 100 acres. Today it is known for its art, featuring animals both native and from far-flung areas, showing just how far the Chavín Culture reached.

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NORTE CHICO: ANCIENTS IN THE AMERICAS

They were the oldest-known civilisation in the Americas and raised monumental structures, but so little is left of them 5,000 years on. Here's what archaeological excavations have unearthed in the deserts of Peru

Written by Dominic Eames

Caral

The ancient capital is the chief Norte Chico tourist destination and an invaluable archaeological site

The most impressive Norte Chico ruins are in the desert of the Supe Valley in Peru, some 193 kilometeres north of Lima, the country's capital, and 22 kilometres inland: the capital city of Caral. Boasting six pyramids, amphitheatres, plazas, a host of smaller mounds and a hive of residential buildings, it was a busy metropolis for perhaps as many as 3,000 people in the third millennium BCE, and a jewel of Norte Chico's immense architecture. The largest platform reached a height of 18 metres, and had a base around 150 metres wide.

Called the 'sacred city', Caral was used for ceremonial purposes, but the ruins have revealed a mix of impressive structures and smaller dwellings, suggesting that Norte Chico society was hierarchical, and that there was an elite.

While there is little evidence that the people were artistic, they were probably musical, as 32 flutes carved from pelican and condor bones were discovered at Caral. One of the most fascinating finds has been the quipu – knotted strings used either as a rudimentary writing system or to record numbers, perhaps relating to trade.

In front of one of the pyramids at Caral stands a huanca, or 'standing stone', which is thought to have held a ceremonial significance

Norte Chico: Ancients in the Americas

Around the time that the Great Pyramids of Giza were being constructed in Egypt, monumental pyramids were being erected by another civilisation on the other side of the world, and some of the cities they built go back many centuries even before that. Yet compared to the Ancient Egyptians, only scraps of information can be gleaned about these people. They were the Norte Chico, the oldest known civilisation in the Americas.

Radiocarbon dating has revealed they were around in the 4th millennium BCE and flourished in the 3rd, living in an area of modern-day Peru. The Norte Chico, also referred to as the Caral-Supe, built on the western coast and in valleys around three major rivers, the Fortaleza, Pativilca and Supe. Irrigation was crucial to their growth, but with as many as 30 sites known to us, the Norte Chico did not spread too far. In fact, by standing on top of a pyramid in one settlement it would have been possible to see another in the distance.

They built magnificent structures – most obviously their terraced rectangular pyramids and circular sunken amphitheatres – that have survived, but there is a lack of ceramics and little in the way of art or religious practices. The Norte Chico had declined by around 1800 BCE, possibly as the arid terrain was abandoned for fertile land. With comprehensive archaeological research only beginning in the 1990s, there is a long way to go in the quest for knowledge about the Norte Chico, but there are some tantalising clues.

The Norte Chico were building monumental pyramids more than 5,000 years ago – several millennia before the Olmecs thrived in Mesoamerica

Huaricanga

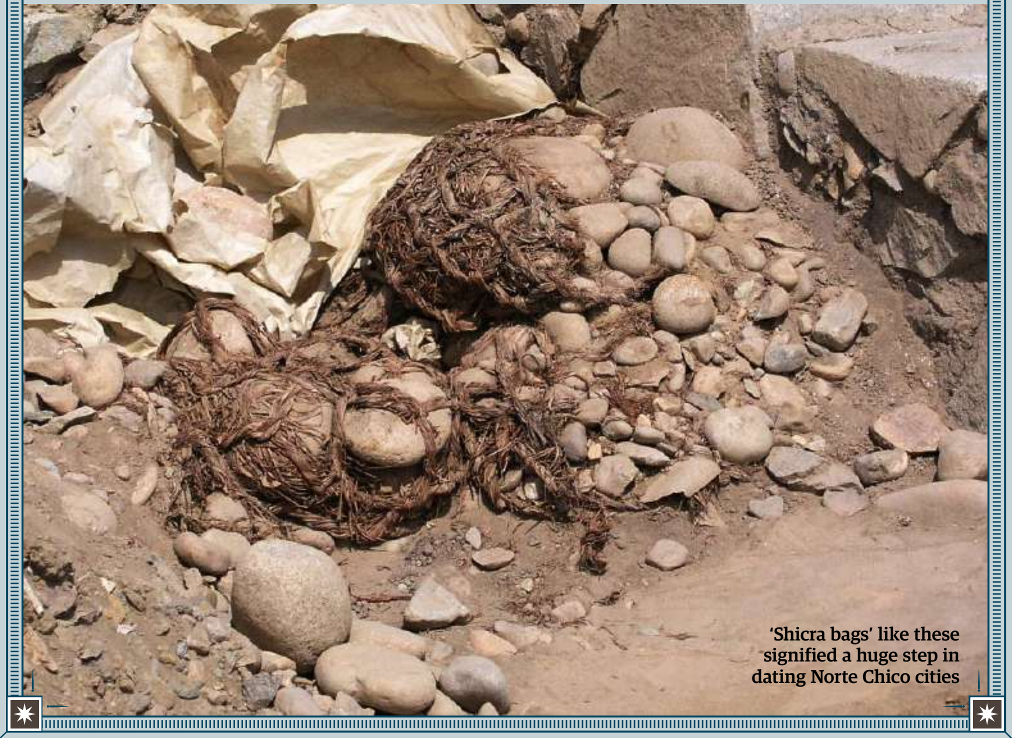
It has long been claimed that Caral was the oldest city in the Americas, but ancient grass has questioned this

Existing as early as 3500 BCE, Huaricanga in the Fortaleza Valley is the oldest city of the Norte Chico civilisation. It also includes their largest mound, measuring more than 200 metres in length. So, how were they able to carry out building projects on such a monumental scale?

Their secret was 'shicra bags'. Round mesh bags would be made of sturdy reeds and grass, filled with stones, and then hauled on the workers' backs to the designated site. There, they lined the construction trenches in order to reinforce the walls. This allowed the pyramids to reach remarkable heights for an ancient civilisation, and helped them survive for 5,000 years.

Shicra bags being made of grass has been crucial for radiocarbon dating – archaeologists were able to identify Huaricanga as the oldest Norte Chico city.

It was also likely a religious centre, where people travelled from outlying settlements for seasonal rituals. There are two large huanca, or standing stones, which may have been used for ceremonial purposes. That said, knowledge of the Norte Chico's religion is limited, essentially to an image of what may be a god on a 3rd-millennium-BCE gourd.



'Shicra bags' like these signified a huge step in dating Norte Chico cities

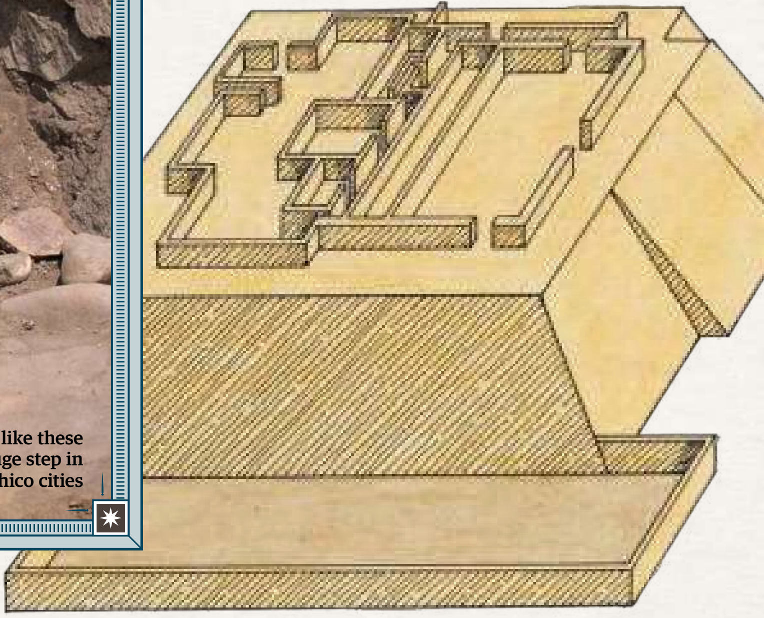
Aspero

Did the Norte Chico fight among themselves or against their neighbours? If so, they left no trace

Aspero is one of the many Norte Chico sites to have been unearthed on the coast of Peru. As such, it would have been a bustling fishing settlement, evidenced by the excavation of nets and fish hooks. Although initially identified in the early 20th century, major archaeological work did not take place until the 1970s, but since then it has been possible to establish an image of what Aspero's main complex would have looked like. The rectangular stepped pyramid with buildings on top and stairs leading to a circular amphitheatre sunken in the earth was a distinctive feature of many sites.

At Aspero, there are two huge platform mounds called Huaca de los Sacrificios and Huaca de los Idolos, but there is a noticeable lack of a certain type of structure. There are no defences – and this is consistent with other Norte Chico settlements. As no battlements, weapons or skeletons with battle injuries have been found, it seems that there was no warfare among the Norte Chico people.

Illustration of Huaca de Los Idolos burial mound, at Aspero



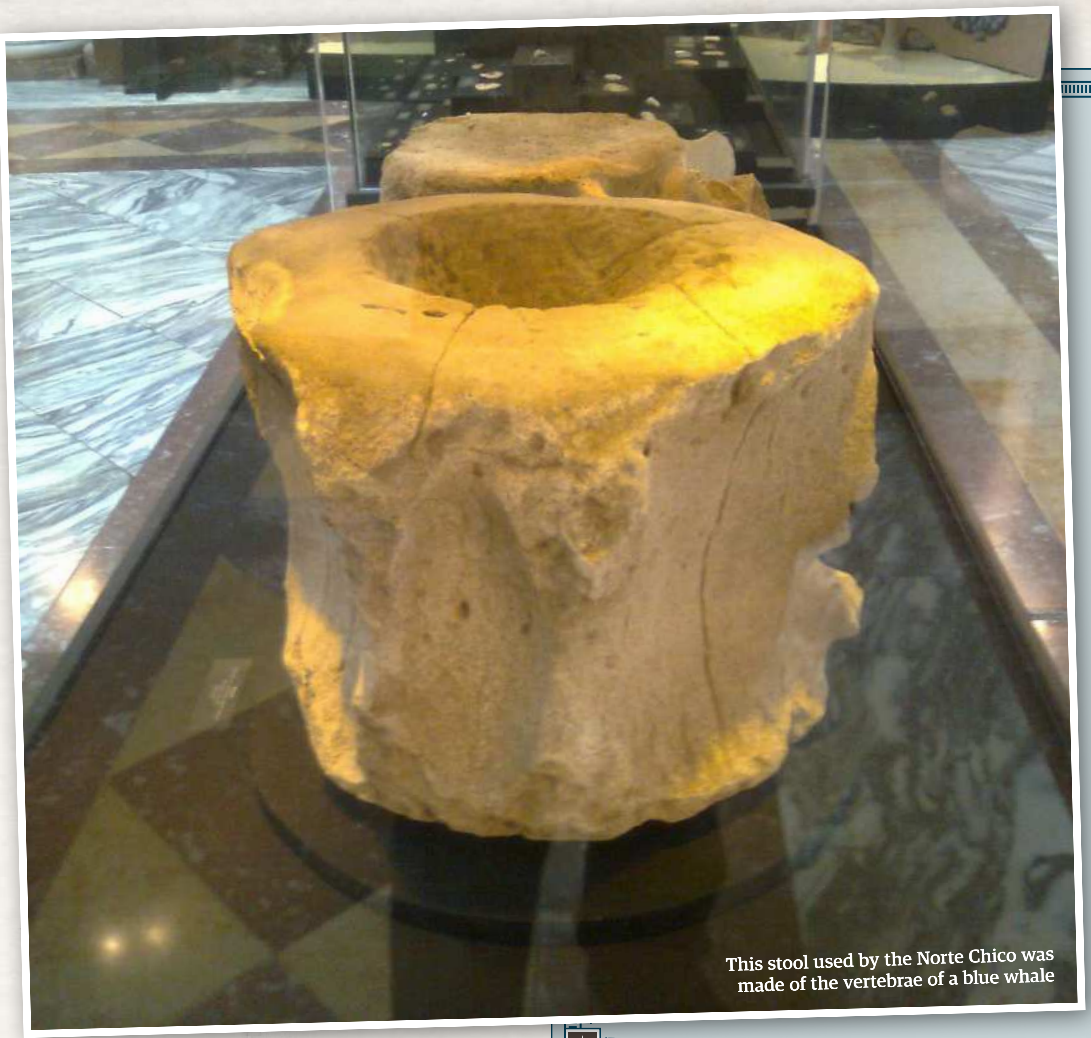
Bandurria

While the desert was far from an ideal place for agriculture, innovative irrigation systems meant the Norte Chico built their monumental structures on a full stomach

The colossal pyramids and mounds of Bandurria were mistaken for natural rocky hills before many millennia of sand and earth was removed. It was discovered in 1973 and, according to Alejandro Chu Barrera, director of the Archaeological Project of Bandurria, dates back to 3200 BCE. If so, the city – which got its name from a species of bird in the area – would be older than Caral.

Something curious about Norte Chico excavations like Bandurria is that no ceramics have ever been discovered. Commonly, pottery is a constant feature of an ancient people and a surface for a culture's art. Yet the Norte Chico seemed to have none, meaning few examples of art and no pots for cooking. Understandably, seafood made up a significant part of their diet due to their proximity to the Pacific Ocean, but there was successful agriculture too, made possible by irrigation systems. Traces of squash, beans, sweet potato, avocado and a number of other fruits and vegetables have been found. It was long thought that there was no cereal crop in the Norte Chico diet, and while it seems that they did eat maize, it was not a staple food.

Parts of Bandurria has been damaged in recent decades, but the platform mound is still standing



This stool used by the Norte Chico was made of the vertebrae of a blue whale

Bone stool

The Norte Chico certainly benefited from the sea, but the question of their maritime links has proved hugely controversial

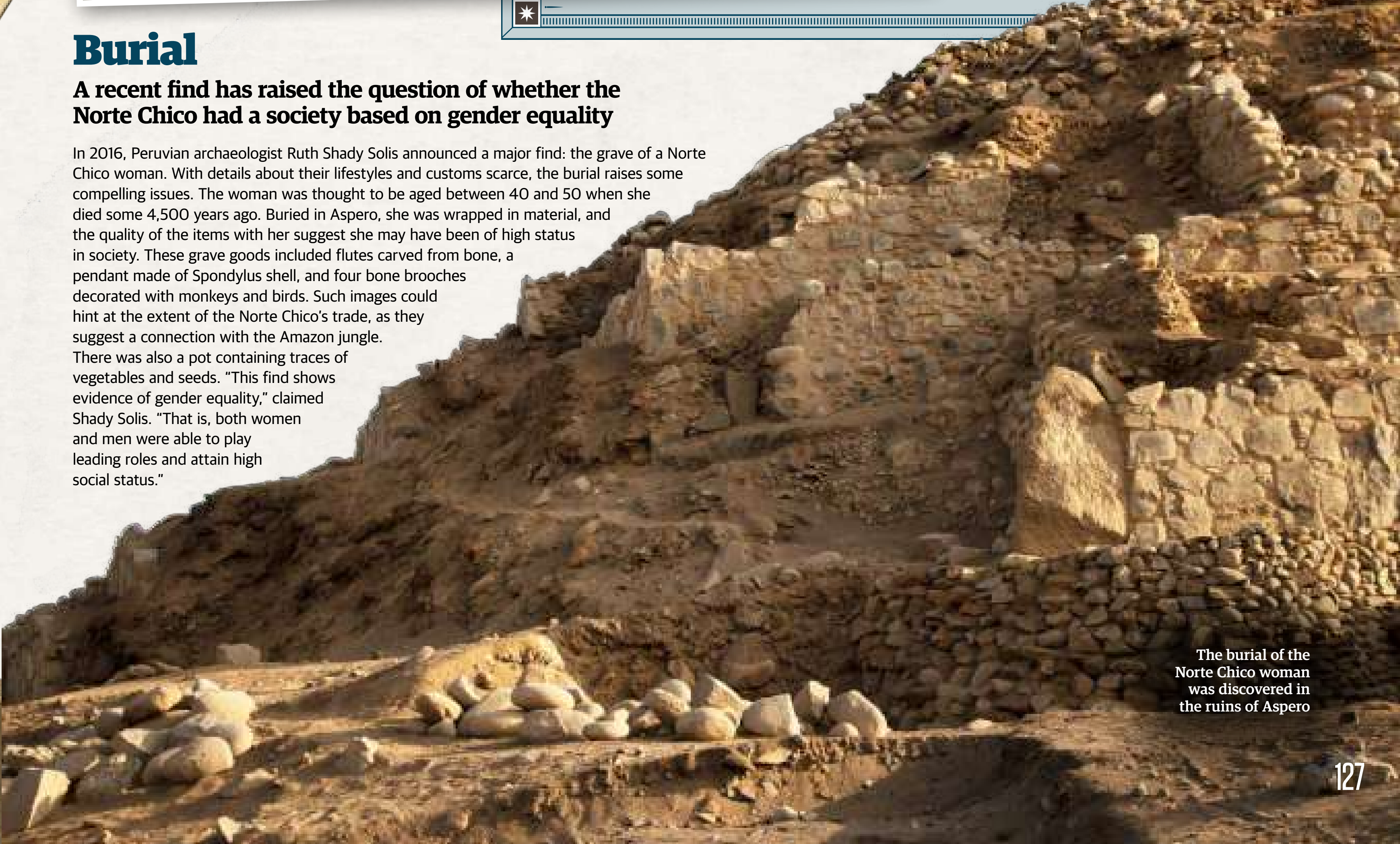
Since the 1990s, there have been two main groups of archaeologists working on Norte Chico sites, one led by Peruvian Ruth Shady Solis, and the other headed by American husband-and-wife team Jonathan Haas and Winifred Creamer. They have regularly contested each other's work and bitterly argued, but the most contentious issue concerns whether the Norte Chico were fundamentally a maritime culture.

To some, the accepted understanding was that they flourished on the coast first and then moved inland, where they built cities like Caral. Undoubtedly, the sea was an important factor for the Norte Chico, as seen by the appropriation of a whale bone as a stool. Yet it has been put forward that the inland settlements were actually emerging around the same time as those on the coast, if not before, and that agriculture was the key to their success. No matter which came first, the inland and coastal populations developed a strong interdependent relationship, whereby the latter provided seafood, and cotton grown by the former was vital for making fishing nets.

Burial

A recent find has raised the question of whether the Norte Chico had a society based on gender equality

In 2016, Peruvian archaeologist Ruth Shady Solis announced a major find: the grave of a Norte Chico woman. With details about their lifestyles and customs scarce, the burial raises some compelling issues. The woman was thought to be aged between 40 and 50 when she died some 4,500 years ago. Buried in Aspero, she was wrapped in material, and the quality of the items with her suggest she may have been of high status in society. These grave goods included flutes carved from bone, a pendant made of Spondylus shell, and four bone brooches decorated with monkeys and birds. Such images could hint at the extent of the Norte Chico's trade, as they suggest a connection with the Amazon jungle. There was also a pot containing traces of vegetables and seeds. "This find shows evidence of gender equality," claimed Shady Solis. "That is, both women and men were able to play leading roles and attain high social status."



The burial of the Norte Chico woman was discovered in the ruins of Aspero

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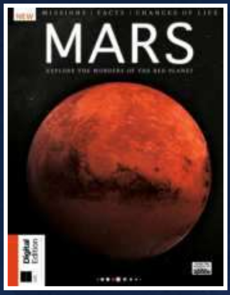

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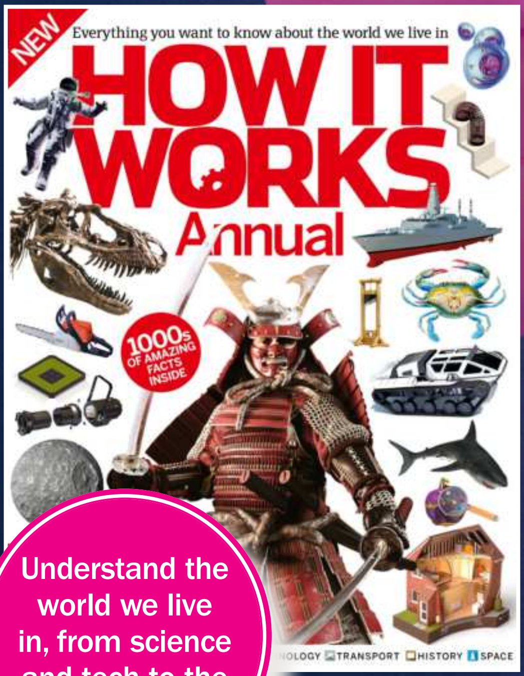

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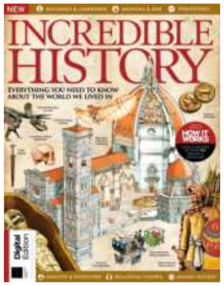
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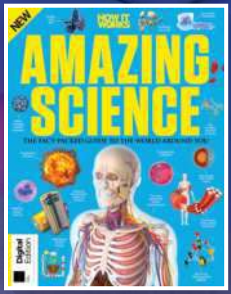
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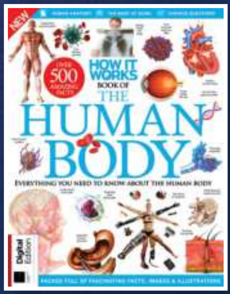
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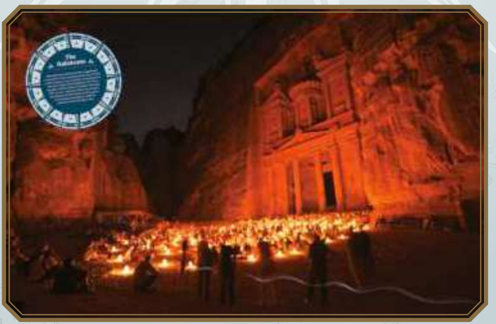

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